

THE TREATMENT OF WOMEN IN
BYRON'S **DON JUAN**

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

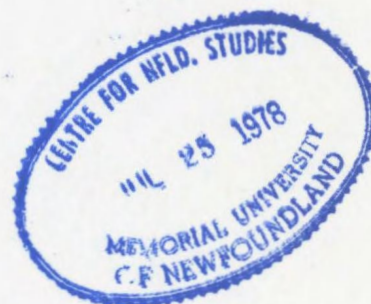
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ELIZABETH ANNE MILLER

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THE TREATMENT OF WOMEN IN
BYRON'S DON JUAN

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C Elizabeth Anne Miller
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INTRODUCTION

One of the two according to your choice,
Woman or wine, you'll have to undergo;
Both maladies are taxes on our joys:
But which to choose, I really hardly know;
(Don Juan, IV, xxv)

In these lines, Byron is both facetious and serious: On the surface he appears to be treating women very lightly; but the lines express a total contempt for the opposite sex. It is such contempt that underlies the treatment of women in the whole of Don Juan. Individual women throughout the poem are for the most part presented in an unfavorable light; in their portraits, Byron catalogues all the characteristics that he personally finds despicable in women. But he does not content himself with presenting women with the faults of hypocrisy, deception, scheming and the like; he finds it necessary to apply these characteristics to womankind in general.

Bitter and contemptuous remarks about women far outnumber comments which suggest sympathy; indeed the latter, for the most part, are no more than egotistic concessions. The prevailing attitude is one of contempt. The same attitude is present in his treatment of marriage, an institution that fails mainly because woman is a part of it. The marriages portrayed in the poem are without exception unhappy ones; no allowances are made for discord or human weakness, and a successful marriage is seen as a contradiction.

in terms. Byron's own brand of marriage, "natural marriage", fails no doubt because the poet is convinced that such an arrangement cannot survive in society as he knows it.

Byron employs all the weapons in his arsenal to present women in the light in which he feels they deserve to be presented. He uses a verse form that permits a building toward a climax, with a shattering closing couplet; he uses humor which ranged from the facetious to the savage; he takes it upon himself to be the spokesman for all men. If one did not know the story of Byron's life, one might feel at a loss to explain such an attitude. But a consideration of some biographical facts will help place the whole matter in perspective.

CHAPTER 1

BYRON: THE MAN, THE POET, AND THE PERSONA

Discussion of the role of women in Dón Juan has frequently centred on biographical data; indeed, some critics have gone so far as to draw parallels between particular women in the poem and actual women in Byron's own experience.¹ While there may be some validity in speculating on such parallels, the inherent danger is obvious: this type of activity could lead to a mechanical treatment of the poem, reducing the love episodes to a series of autobiographical occurrences reproduced in an imaginative narrative. On the other hand, one cannot dismiss the biographical data as completely irrelevant. If one is to comprehend Byron's attitudes towards women, sex, and love, one must understand Byron's frame of mind while he was writing these cantos; for that frame of mind was determined in part by his own network of personal relationships with women during childhood, youth, and manhood. It may be of some benefit, therefore, to trace briefly a few of these relationships, and to note any possible significance they may have in interpreting the role

¹ Chief among such critics are Leslie Marchand, Byron's Poetry, A Critical Introduction (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), and Paul Trueblood, The Flowering of Byron's Genius (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962).

of women in Don Juan.

In a recent biographical study Bernard Grebanier comments that "by heritage, birth, and childhood experience Byron was destined to erotic confusion."² If one traces Byron's ancestry, one can readily find examples of sexual notoriety: the wife of the first Lord Byron is said to have been the seventeenth mistress of Charles II;³ the brother of Byron's grandfather, known as "Wicked Lord Byron", was a rake; his grandfather's love affairs provided local gossips with innumerable lurid stories; his own father, "Mad Jack", exceeded them both in scandal and extravagance.⁴ Byron himself was born in 1788 with a serious physical handicap, which "probably did more to shape his character than it will ever be possible to calculate."⁵ His mother was obsessed both by frustration over her son's deformity, and by passionate grief over her husband's philandering ways. It seems that she released much of her pent-up emotion on young Byron, who became the recipient of mingled hatred and love.

²Bernard Grebanier, The Uninhibited Byron (New York: Crown, 1970), p. 17.

³Samuel Pepys, The Diary of Samuel Pepys, ed. W. B. Wheatley, 8 vols. (London: George Bell & Sons, 1896), p.286.

⁴Biographical data, except where otherwise indicated, are taken from L. Marchand, Byron: A Biography, 3 vols. (London: Murray, 1957), and Marchand, Byron: A Portrait (New York: Knopf, 1970).

⁵Marchand, Portrait, p. 9.

Byron's father died when the boy was only three and a half; yet Byron later recalls vividly: "I perfectly remember him, and had very early a horror of matrimony, from the sight of domestic broils. . . ."⁶

"My passions were developed very early" writes Byron, ". . . so early, that few would believe me, if I were to state the period, and the facts which accompanied it."⁷ It seems likely that Byron is referring to an early sex-awakening (at the age of nine) at the hands of his nurse-maid, May Gray, who "used to come to bed with him and play tricks with his person."⁸ If such an experience were frustrating to a child of Byron's temperament, it could quite conceivably lead to a sense of melancholy springing not only from feelings of disgust, but more important from an awareness of the failure of real experiences to measure up to ideal expectations. The first important female love in young Byron's life was Mary Chaworth.⁹ Byron says of Mary: "I have taken all my fables about the celestial nature of women from the perfection my imagination created in her--I say created, for I found her,

⁶Medwin's Conversations of Lord Byron, ed. E. J. Lovell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), pp. 56-7.

⁷Quoted in Marchand, Portrait, p. 20.

⁸Quoted in Marchand, Portrait, p. 20.

⁹Evidence points to several affairs with males, notably the Earl of Clare at Harrow, and John Edleston at Cambridge.

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like the rest of her sex, anything but angelic."¹⁰ The abrupt ending of the one-sided affair humiliated Byron deeply, and it seems that the hurt was still present years later as he recalls the episode in Don Juan:

I have a passion for the name of 'Mary',
For once it was a magic sound to me;
And still it half calls up the realms of fairy,
Where I beheld what never was to be;

(Canto V, iv)

The rejection by Mary, coupled with the earlier disillusionment of sex play without fulfillment, significantly helped to mould Byron's attitudes towards sex. The image of ideal love is an image destined never to become a reality.

During his subsequent years at Cambridge, followed by his famous travels throughout Europe, Byron is reputed to have had numerous romantic attachments. Perhaps most significant were those of longing, rather than those of possession, as expressed in this line to the Maid of Athens: "By that lip I long to taste". His periods of sexual abandon can be seen as the result of disillusionment with idealized love.

It is interesting to note that such affairs were usually with women below his social and intellectual level, sexual companions who were unable to share his thoughts and feelings. Byron's manhood years in England were marked by many affairs, one of the most notorious being his reckless fling with Lady Caroline Lamb. Following the end of that rather involved

¹⁰ Medwin's Conversations, p. 61.

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affair, Byron made a remark that is significant to the present study: "... loving at all is quite out of my way; I am tired of being a fool . . . I don't make love till almost obliged."¹¹ There were also brief relationships with Lady Oxford and Frances Webster, as well as a warm attachment to one of his closest confidantes, Lady Melbourne.

Most complicated of all were his relations with his wife, Annabella Milbanke, and his half-sister Augusta. Byron said of Annabella early in their courtship that "she is too good for a fallen spirit to know, and I should like her more if she were less perfect."¹² Annabella's determination to reform the rake that she married was one of the factors that caused the breakdown of their marriage. Most biographers agree, however, that the major cause of the separation was that Annabella became confirmed in her suspicions that Byron and Augusta were having an incestuous relationship. Many critics have devoted much time to disproving this theory.¹³ Much evidence, however, in support of the incest theory can be gleaned from Byron's own remarks in his correspondence.

¹¹Lord Byron's Correspondence, 2 vols., ed. John Murray (London: Murray, 1922), Vol. 1, p. 72.

¹²Byron's Letters and Journals, ed. L. Marchand (London: Murray, 1973), Vol. 11, p. 176.

¹³See G. Wilson Knight in Lord Byron's Marriage (London: Routledge & Paul, 1957). Grebanier in The Uninhibited Byron attempts to prove that the separation resulted from an act of sodomy.

He writes: "I am at this moment in a far more serious, and entirely new, scrape than any of the last twelve months".¹⁴

Again, on October 4, 1814, Byron writes "She [Augusta] wished me much to marry, because it was the only chance of redemption for two persons."¹⁵ On October 7 he says "her only error has been my fault entirely, and for this I can plead no excuse, except passion. . . ." ¹⁶ Then there is "poetic" evidence: for example, in the first draft of "The Bride of Abydos", Selim and Zuleika were brother and sister. There is also the oft-quoted passage in Don Juan, a personal note interjected by Byron in his discussion of Juan and Leila:

. . . for he never had a sister:
Ah! if he had, how much he would have miss'd her!
(X, liii)

Although such evidence is at best "circumstantial", it cannot be totally ignored. Furthermore, the incestuous relationship can be understood in terms of Byron's own personality which reflected a fascination with the forbidden, and a fatalistic view of depravity.

The failure of his marriage to Annabella confirmed his earlier disillusionment. It is as if Byron had tried to create in Annabella an image of the ideal for which he had been continuously striving, an ideal to which no woman can be

¹⁴Quoted in Marchand, Portrait, p. 147.

¹⁵Lord Byron's Correspondence, Vol. 11, pp. 273-4.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 276.

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expected to measure. The bitterness and convulsion into which the "child of love" was born were the results of the final shattering of an idealized image of perfection in woman. The failure of woman to become that image is essentially Byron's failure, an expression of which is at the core of the love episodes of Don Juan. His experience with marriage embittered his already negative attitude towards it; as Annabella wrote to Augusta after the separation, "I will only recall to Lord Byron's mind his avowed and insurmountable aversion to the married state, and the desire and determination he has expressed ever since its commencement to free himself from that bondage. . . ." ¹⁷

It is clear that these events influenced Don Juan. Leslie Marchand contends that "recent biographical evidence shows convincingly that no writer was ever more patently autobiographical in the creations of his imagination" ¹⁸ and that in Don Juan "the characters, the attitudes, and the feelings were faithfully extracted from his own most poignant memories." ¹⁹ While it may be true in part that "Don Juan is as subjective as Byron's correspondence", ²⁰ one would be mistaken to

¹⁷Quoted in Marchand, Portrait, pp. 219-20.

¹⁸Marchand, Poetry, p. 13.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 159.

²⁰C. M. Fuess, Lord Byron as a Satirist in Verse (New York: Columbia University Press, 1912), p. 164.

consider the love episodes in the poem merely as an autobiographical account. What is true is that Byron's personality lies behind the narrative, and the affairs in his own life are significant only insofar as they helped to shape that personality. The poem reveals Byron in all of his complexity, and portrays a world with that personality indelibly stamped upon it.

It is important at this point to consider the rather complex question of the "persona" in Don Juan. As one reads the poem, one becomes conscious of three possible figures: Don Juan himself, the narrator, a partly fictitious persona, and Byron. There is not always a clear distinction between the narrator and the poet, nor did Byron intend there to be one. Rather both the illusion and the reality operate simultaneously. As M. K. Joseph notes, "this process of simultaneous self-dramatisation and self-detachment finds its realisation in the dissociation of hero and narrator."²¹ Although Juan is the hero of the poem, he hardly exists as a character; certainly his point of view is not fully utilized or explored. His function seems to be to provide a loose union of a series of episodic adventures. The essential unity comes from the omnipresence of Byron himself, sometimes operating through his "fictitious" persona, and sometimes

²¹M. K. Joseph, Byron the Poet (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1964), p. 196.

speaking directly. Thus he is able to deal with many essentially autobiographical elements, while at the same time sustaining the illusion of fiction. Byron is not Don Juan, even though Juan may encounter situations familiar to Byron. The use of the persona enables Byron to separate himself from Juan, yet to participate in the commentary.

In the early stages of the poem, Byron deliberately creates a fictitious persona: "I'm a plain man, and in a single station" (I, lxxii); or again, in these lines:

But if there's anything in which I shine,
'Tis in arranging all my friends' affairs,
Not having, of my own, domestic cares.

(I, xxiii)

Yet even in these early cantos, the disguise is thin: "I recollect Great Britain's coast looks white" (II, xii), and "As for the ladies, I have nought to say, / A wanderer from the British world of fashion" (II, clxvi). Byron finds it increasingly impossible to keep himself out of the narrative; as the poem progresses, the illusion of a persona other than the poet fades away. It is Byron himself who says "I knew one woman of that purple school, / The loveliest, chastest, best, but--quite a fool." (IV, cxi). By this point in the poem, any attempt at maintaining a fictitious persona is forgotten, and the persona becomes Byron himself:

They accuse me,--Me--the present writer of
The present poem--of--I know not what--

(VII, iii)

Talk not of seventy years as age; in seven
I have seen more changes . . .

(XI, lxxxii)

Gave what I had--a heart; as the world went, I
 Gave what was worth a world; for worlds could never
 Restore me those pure feelings, gone for ever.
 (VI, v)

The most significant consequence of the fact that Byron becomes his own persona is the deliberate use of digression and commentary. It is not always easy to separate the commentary from the narrative. In some cases the commentary arises naturally from an incident in the plot, but frequently there seems to be no logical starting point. Often, the digressions have thematic content, and it is in such digressions that one can find most of the poet's attitudes towards love and women expressed. An even more important function of the digression, from the point of view of the present discussion, is that it keeps us constantly aware of the omnipresence of Byron himself. Byron stands outside the narrative that he has created, and speaks to the reader in a one-to-one confrontation.

The destruction of the fictional illusion and the inconsistency of the point of view can be seen as part of the total purpose of the poem: to create an image of a distorted reality.

But if a writer should be quite consistent,
 How could he possibly show things existent?
 (XV, lxxxvii)

Byron is trying, as one critic suggests, to create "as

coherent a vision of incoherence as possible".²²

Don Juan is a poem about many diverse topics: society, travel, war, corruption, greed. But it is also a poem about women, marriage, and love. Because these are personal and subjective topics, one must concede that any treatment of them will be affected by the personality and the romantic experiences of the writer. This is certainly the case with Byron. His numerous experiences with women, his bitter attitudes towards marriage, and his disillusionment with love can be found in any biography as well as in the pages of Don Juan. One does not have to be informed about Byron's life and personality to uncover these attitudes in this poem; the poem itself provides sufficient evidence to reach the conclusions that the man who wrote it was frustrated, bitter, and resentful towards women, and had all but abandoned any possibility of ideal love.

²²Robert F. Gleckner, Byron and the Ruins of Paradise (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), p. 331.

CHAPTER 2

GENERAL VIEWS ON WOMEN, MARRIAGE AND LOVE

Women

Part of Byron's purpose in Don Juan is to reflect the havoc that can be made of a young man's life by women. It is essential to realize that the hero, Don Juan,¹ was never intended to be a pursuer or seducer in the tradition of his namesake. The anglicized pronunciation of "Juan" is much more than a necessity for rhythmic effect; it is part of the underlying irony of the reversal of roles. Criticism of the poem based on a comparison between Byron's hero and the libertine Don Juan is rather pointless, as it fails to take into account this ironic reversal.¹ The significance of the poem insofar as the attitudes it expresses about women are concerned, revolves around a realization of the role of Juan himself. He is the seduced, the pursued, a victim of the whims and wiles of the various women that he encounters. Juan's reactions to each of his affairs is therefore coloured by Byron's view of the youth, and of

¹W.H. Auden takes this line of pursuit: "As a libertine, his Don Juan, who sleeps with only four women, and then either because they take the initiative or because they happen to be around, makes a poor showing beside... Byron himself with his 200 Venetian girls". ["The Life of a That-There Poet", New Yorker, April 26 (1958), p. 148].

himself, as the most pursued of men. "At the root of the poem's irony is the extraordinary passivity and innocence of its protagonist."²

The characteristics of passivity and innocence rest in the hero, while the women assume the roles of pursuer and seducer. A look at each of the love affairs in the poem will readily verify this statement: Julia seeks out Juan and encourages him by her advances; Haidee finds Juan on the shore and restores him to life and love; Gulbeyaz has Juan purchased and brought to her for her pleasure; Catherine adopts Juan as a suitable paramour; Lady Adeline shows signs of a growing love for Juan, of which he is unaware. In the final scene of the last complete canto, we observe Juan in the clutches of yet another scheming female. Similar situations occur in the non-romantic relationships of Juan with women. He is the victim of the wily deceit of his mother; he is forced to spend a night in the Turkish harem as a result of a disguise imposed upon him; even in the case of Aurora Raby, it is her apparent aloofness that draws him towards her. There is only one female character in the poem to whom this formula cannot be applied - Leila. It was Juan who found the little Turkish girl amongst a heap of dead bodies; it was Juan who rescued her from danger and

²Harold Bloom, The Visionary Company. (New York: Doubleday, 1961), p. 263.

insisted on protecting her. But Leila is a child, as yet unaffected by the ways of women. She serves more as a foil to the warlike avarice of the Russian Empress, illustrating that something beautiful can emerge out of the degradation of war.

Don Juan exhibits a wide range of attitudes towards women, but the poem is essentially a man's statement about the opposite sex. One has to contend with seemingly contradictory remarks about women as Byron's views undergo many changes throughout the poem. Of course, part of this ambivalence can be explained by the circumstances under which the poem was written; Byron composed it intermittently over a period of five years, returning to it each time as to a new work. Referring to this "mobilité", E.E. Bostetter suggests that "Byron was creating and shaping the genre of his poem as he wrote, presenting the world...mirrored in the stream of his own consciousness."³ As far as the attitudes towards women are concerned, one finds at one extreme bitter and contemptuous remarks and at the other passages which seem to indicate generosity and even sympathy.

The prevailing attitude, however, is one of scorn, an attitude which is reflected at every stage of the poem.

³E.E. Bostetter, "Introduction" to Twentieth Century Interpretations of 'Don Juan' (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 12.

Byron's chief concern is to satirize those general attributes in women that he despises. Some of these are minor, and receive only brief mention: woman's love of revenge ("Sweet is revenge - especially to women"); their use of charm for deceitful purposes ("The charming creatures lie with such a grace,/ There's nothing so becoming to the face."); the fact that women shed and use tears "at their liking". Women are vicious when they are unable to have their own way:

A tigress robb'd of young, a lioness,
Or any interesting beast of prey,
Are similes at hand for the distress
Of ladies who cannot have their own way;
(V, cxxxii)

Unlike men, women allow their hearts to rule their heads: "Men with their heads reflect on this and that-/ But women with their hearts on heaven knows what!" (VI, ii). Women are frivolous and do not take things seriously:

Now here we should distinguish; for howe'er
Kisses, sweet words, embraces, and all that,
May look like what is -- neither here nor there,
They are put on as easily as a hat,
Or rather bonnet, which the fair sex wear,
(VI, xiv)

Females love to talk: "I have one simile, and that's a blunder,/ For wordless woman, which is silent thunder" (VI, lvii). Unable to stand by a decision, "few of the soft sex are very stable / In their resolves" (XV, vi).

Notice that in each of the cases quoted above, the reference is to women as a group, signified either by the use of the plural number or by the substitution of a

collective term. This is significant, as it indicates that Byron is condemning not so much particular women as qualities that he has noticed among women in general. The same point will be discussed in further detail when the actual women in the poem are considered. Yet the fact does emphasize the view that the drawing of parallels between these women and real women in Byron's life is an inadequate procedure. Byron's major concern is to portray those characteristics of womankind that he finds annoying.

The foregoing examples are minor, in that the irony and satire contained in them are gentle. The same cannot be said of other references, where Byron becomes much more bitter and sarcastic. At one point he professes that he loves women because of their remarkable ability for lies:

Now what I love in women is, they won't
Or can't do otherwise than lie, but do it
So well, the very truth seems falsehood to it.

(XI, xxxvi)

Having made this comment, the poet launches an attack, in the guise of praise, on all liars and lies! Byron is also harsh on women and their attitudes towards bachelors; women, he contends, seem to take delight in scheming, plotting, and matchmaking to such an extent that no eligible bachelor is free from their snares. The very presence of a bachelor flatters the "hymeneal hopes" of virgins, and encourages married ladies to thoughts of infidelity. On his arrival in England, Juan is subjected to the typical

advances of women:

Fair virgins blush'd upon him; wedded dames
Bloom'd also in less transitory hues;

Daughters admired his dress, and pious mothers
Inquired his income, and if he had brothers.

(XI, xlviii)

Again, a young unmarried man has "an awkward part to play":

Where everybody has some separate aim,
An end to answer, or a plan to lay-
The single ladies wishing to be double.
The married ones to save the virgin's trouble.

(XII, lviii)

Even more bitter is the insult with which Byron describes the plight of the Turkish women following the Russian occupation. In spite of the fact that "six old damsels, each of seventy years / Were all deflower'd by different grenadiers", there were several middle-aged ladies bitterly disappointed, asking in their dismay "Wherefore the ravishing did not begin". This gross distortion cannot be explained except in terms of contempt and sarcasm. This remark is bound to cause trouble for those who consider Byron's attitude towards women as one of sympathy and understanding. Yet this impression is quite prevalent and needs to be examined in some detail. The main difficulty lies with the ambivalence in many of the statements about women in the poem. To counterbalance the examples of satirical

*M.K. Joseph considers this passage "the only lapse in human understanding in the whole poem" [Byron the Poet, p. 280].

and cynical comments, one can find numerous passages that suggest a profound concern for women. Sympathy for the situation in which women find themselves seems to be suggested in the following lines:

They are right; for man, to man so oft unjust,
Is always so to women; one solè bond
Awaits them, treachery is all their trust;
Taught to conceal, their bursting hearts despond
Over their idol, till some wealthier lust
Buys them in marriage -- and what rests beyond?
A thankless husband, next a faithless lover,
Then dressing, nursing, praying, and all's over.

(11, cc)

If one reads the stanza literally, it is true that one is left with the impression that the poet is sympathizing with the lot of women; that his criticism is directed not so much against women, as against a society which forces women into a conventional pattern of living, breeding, and dying. Yet, if one examines the context in which the stanza occurs, another fact emerges. The poet has been describing Haidée as she watches the sleeping Juan with her soul "O'erflow'd ...with their united power"; not only is her soul in communion with love, but both her soul and love are one with nature: "And all the stars that crowded the blue space/ Saw nothing happier than her glowing face." Then Byron digresses for three stanzas on "the love of women" before returning once again to Haidée who "knew not this" but was living completely for the present - "...She had naught to fear,/ Hope, care, nor love beyond, - her heart beat here." In this context, then, the passage in question takes on a

nihilistic tone; it is as if Byron can see all too clearly in his portrayal of the ideal the disillusionment that accompanies the reality. The views expressed show a momentary flight of fancy, triggered off by the intensity of the ideal that he has just created, yet sobered by the melancholy awareness that the ideal cannot survive. Thus the apparently sympathetic tendencies of the stanza are lost in the poet's reflections about the dichotomy between the ideal and the real.

Another passage frequently used to support the contention that Byron is sympathetic towards women is the following portion of Julia's farewell letter to young Juan:

'Man's love is of man's life a thing apart,
'Tis woman's whole existence; man may range
The court, camp, church, the vessel, and the mart;
Sword, gown, gain, glory, offer in exchange
Pride, fame, ambition, to fill up his heart,
And few there are whom these cannot estrange;
Men have all these resources, we but one,
To love again, and be again undone.

(l, cxciv)

When one considers the total impression created by the woman who writes this letter, with all of her hypocrisy and self-deception, as well as the final disposition of the letter in the gruesome cannibal scene, the sympathetic intention becomes less certain. Again, the isolation of a particular passage outside of its total context can suggest an intention

that is doubtful, if not even non-existent.⁵

The following lines suggest a sympathy for women, who are harshly victimized by society and by men:

Poor thing of usages! coerced, compell'd,
Victim when wrong, and martyr oft when right,
Condemn'd to child-bed, as men for their sins
Have shaving too entail'd upon their chins, -

A daily plague, which in the aggregate
May average on the whole with parturition.
But as to women, who can penetrate
The real sufferings of their she condition?

(XIV, xxiii-iv)

Yet, one need only observe the lines that immediately precede this passage, and a different tone emerges:

Alas! worlds fall -- and women, since she fell'd
The world (as, since that history, less polite
Than true, hath been a creed so strictly held),
Has not yet given up the practice quite.

(XIV, xxiii)

Then there is the rather ludicrous comparison of the respective "plagues" of women and of men: "childbed" and "shaving". It is impossible to take Byron seriously in lines such as these, for such a comparison defeats any possibility of reading sympathy into the lines. Continuing in the following stanzas, he leaves no doubt that the dominant tone is one of levity:

I for one venerate a petticoat -
A garment of a mystical sublimity,
No matter whether russet, silk, or dimity.

(XIV, xxvi)

⁵The significance of Julia's letter will be considered in more detail in a later chapter.

There are numerous other examples to support the contention that what seems to be a sympathetic and understanding attitude is in essence contemptuous. When one weighs such examples as have been just considered with those discussed earlier, one is forced to the conclusion that the earlier passages create the more lasting impression. A remark such as the following reference to Baba tends to undermine all of the so-called sympathetic lines:

Away he went then upon his commission,
 Growling and grumbling in good Turkish phrase
 Against all women of whate'er condition,
 Especially sultanas and their ways;
 Their obstinacy, pride, and indecision,
 Their never knowing their own mind two days,
 The trouble that they gave, their immorality,
 Which made him daily bless his own neutrality.

(VI, cxvii)

There seems little doubt that in such passages the poet is much more comfortable with his material, as reflected in the lack of the ambivalence that creates problems in so many other passages, and in the success with which he employs his verse to produce the "bubble-bursting" technique that is so much a part of his style.

A final comment on the matter of women and the attitude of the poet towards them comes from the poet himself:

What a strange thing is man! and what a stranger
 Is woman! What a whirlwind is her head,
 And what a whirlpool full of depth and danger
 Is all the rest about her!

(IX, lxiv)

Byron does not understand women, but rather presents and interprets them from the point of view of a man who believes himself to be a victim of their wiles. One can hardly expect to find objectivity under such circumstances.

Marriage

Byron's eleventh commandment, "Thou shalt not marry", indicates that the institution of marriage is one of the chief targets of the satire of Don Juan. Indeed, the theme of marriage recurs throughout the narrative; it is also prominent in the commentary, where numerous remarks are made by the poet to reinforce the situations involving marriage that occur in the story. Occasionally, as in the Haidee episode, the commentary is in direct contrast to the narrative. Byron attacks not so much the institution of marriage as its abuses and limitations. He condemns many of the motives that lie behind marriage, finding in them the underlying causes of marital breakdown. In a more positive vein, he presents his view of "natural marriage" that thrives on love rather than on formality, convention, and expediency.

Love and marriage, according to the poet, rarely combine:

'Tis melancholy, and a fearful sign
Of human frailty, folly, also crime,
That love and marriage rarely can combine,
Although they both are born in the same clime;
Marriage from love, like vinegar from wine--
A sad, sour, sober beverage--by time

Is sharpen'd from its high celestial flavour,
Down to a very homely household savour.

(III, v)

If, by any chance, love did exist at the outset, the
experiences of marriage soon cause it to diminish:

There's doubtless something in domestic doings
Which forms, in fact, true love's antithesis;
Romances paint at full length people's wooings,
But only give a bust of marriages;

(III, viii)

Happiness in marriage, where it exists, is brief:

The whole camp rung with joy; you would have thought
That they were going to a marriage feast
(This metaphor, I think, holds good as aught,
Since there is discord after both at least):

(VII, xlix)

Love, the essential ingredient of a successful marriage,
is forced farther and farther into the background until it
disappears completely.

Why does such a situation exist? What are the causes
of the failure of marriage? Byron explores the answer to
these questions in two areas: the motives for marriage in
the first place, and the reasons for continuation of a
marriage that has obviously failed. Society forces upon
women the role of a marriage partner, considering females
as "vestals" to be "brought to the marriage mart." But
society alone is not to blame, for women themselves are
desirous of this estate; they plot and scheme to achieve
it, and engage in activities to lead other women into
matrimony. The eligible bachelor is sought after feverishly
by "The single ladies wishing to be double"; while the mother

pursues her role with equal vigor: "Perhaps you'll have a letter from the mother, / To say her daughter's feelings are trepann'd;" (XII, lx). The fascination that women find in match-making is dealt with:

Next to the making matches for herself,
And daughters, brothers, sisters, kith or kin,
Arranging them like books on the same shelf,
There's nothing women love to dabble in
More (like a stock-holder in growing pelf)
Than match-making in general:

(XV, XXXI) ✓

Women see marriage as a convenience and as a form of financial security, with love as a rather secondary concern. Marriage for monetary advantage is severely criticized by Byron as he warns facetiously, "Without cash, Malthus tells you -- take no brides." As a consequence of such motives, romance has little hope of survival, and infidelity is a likely consequence. As Paul Trueblood remarks, "...Byron's attack on marriage is directed against its mercenary aspect, its perfunctoriness, its want of romance and love and consequent infidelity..."⁶ Marriages resulting from such motives can only lead to a state of apathetic endurance:

They lived together as most people do,
Suffering each other's foibles by accord,
And not exactly either one or two;

(I, lxv)

Having recognized these underlying causes of marriage failure, one can observe throughout the poem specific factors discussed in connection with married couples:

⁶Trueblood, The Flowering of Byron's Genius, p. 160.

the case of the "perfect" wife who insists on reforming her husband; the union of a man with a woman of superior intellect; the union of a woman with an older man; tyranny in marriage.⁷ Yet Byron is not totally opposed to marriage; indeed, he concedes that a happy marriage is a possibility: "Love may exist with marriage, and should ever, / And marriage also may exist without;" (XII, xv). Yet he chooses to present only unsuccessful marriages in his narrative. His main objection is that society has decreed that love and marriage must co-exist, that "Love sans banns is both a sin and shame". Byron fails to perceive the logic of this. He concedes that love may exist in marriage, but those supporting marriage will not concede to the possibility of love existing outside the matrimonial bond. The very fact that Byron does make this positive statement amid a series of negative remarks is significant, as it shows that his chief concern is with love. As Paul Trueblood notes, it was Byron's regard for love that made him "so keenly alert to the notorious abuses in the institution of marriage."⁸

One must not, however, overemphasize the significance of Byron's few positive statements about marriage; for they

⁷These specific causes will be dealt with more fully in the next chapter.

⁸Trueblood, The Flowering of Byron's Genius, p. 161.

are rare, and are far outnumbered by lines which viciously attack the limitations and abuses of matrimony. Again and again, the poet returns to the confining and restrictive aspect of marriage, symbolizing these undesirable features in the wedding ring:

Thus in the East they are extremely strict,
And wedlock and a padlock mean the same:
(V, clviii)

A royal husband in all save the ring--
Which, being the damn'dest part of matrimony,
Seem'd taking out the sting to leave the honey.
(IX, lxx)

It is significant to note that most of the faults outlined by the poet can be traced to the woman rather than to the man-- the perfect wife, the union with an intellectual woman, the references to the ring. Although the husbands of unhappy marriages may prove unfaithful, their actions can be accounted for by the wife's behaviour, whether it be her perfection, her intelligence, her imperiousness, her cold indifference. It is the wife that is the object of the poet's harshest criticism, while the husband receives only gentle rebuke. The hero, Don Juan, is often the victim of women who are partners in an unsatisfactory marriage. Once again it becomes evident that the commentary on women and marriage is a man's commentary, flavoured by the bitterness and resentment that were part of that man's personal life.

Love

Love is one of the major themes of Don Juan; indeed, much of the narrative as well as a large part of the commentary centres on it. It is a very difficult task to state the poet's definition of love, for it is presented in the poem in all of its variety, complexity and ambiguity.

Byron's attitude towards love in Don Juan varies from romantic longing, to violent passion, to detached cynicism.

The poet presents to the reader many negative forms of love, forms which are attacked and dismissed by the author because each of them denies the value of love as a creating principle. First there is Platonic love, built on a fundamental deception, the denial of the physical basis of love between man and woman:

Oh Plato! Plato! you have paved the way,
 With your confounded fantasies, to more
 Immoral conduct by the fancied sway
 Your system feigns o'er the controlless core
 Of human hearts, than all the long array
 Of poets and romancers: . . .

(I, cxvi)

At the other end of the scale is promiscuous love, which denies the existence of any quality other than the physical; such is the "love" referred to in this passage:

Catherine was generous,--all such ladies are:
 Love--that great opener of the heart and all
 The ways that lead there, be they near or far,
 Love had made Catherine make each lover's fortune,
 (IX, lxxx-lxxxi)

Self-love, that supreme egotism that is a "no less imperious

passion", is anti-creative for it is a total perversion of the concept of love as a giving and a sacrificing of self.

These negative forms of love are handled with the contempt that Byron seems convinced is their due. His sympathies, however, are much more apparent in his treatment of a more positive type of love, first love, which "stands alone/ Like Adam's recollection of his fall". This simile may be a bit unfortunate as it makes the Fall only a sexual one, rather than the voluntary choice of evil over good. Yet as "felix culpa", it may have helped Byron come to grips with the question of man's imperfectibility. First love is passionate and sweet; yet in retrospect it is bitter-sweet, for "The tree of knowledge has been plucked -- all's known-" and all future loves will fall short of this "ambrosial sin".

The most positive form of love revealed in the poem may be called "ideal" love. Byron attempts to create an ideal love relationship in the affair between Juan and Haidee, and foreshadows another attempt in the Juan-Aurora episode. Yet he fails to a great extent to achieve his objective. The most beautiful ideal love relationships in the poem are non-sexual, outside the realm of normal man-woman affairs: There is the love that the old man in the shipwreck expresses for his dying son:

And o'er him bent his sire, and never raised
 His eyes from off his face, but wiped the foam
 From his pale lips, and ever on him gazed,
 And when the wish'd-for shower at length was come,
 And the boy's eyes, which the dull film half glazed,
 Brighten'd, and for a moment seem'd to roam,
 He squeezed from out a rag some drops of rain
 Into his dying child's mouth -- but in vain.

The boy expired -- the father held the clay,
 And look'd upon it long, and when at last
 Death left no doubt, and the dead burthen lay
 Stiff on his heart, and pulse and hope were past,
 He watch'd it wistfully, until away
 'Twas borne by the rude wave wherein 'twas cast;
 (II, lxxxix-xc)

The beauty and transcendence of the love revealed in this passage is not matched by any relationship in the poem between man and woman.

The essential prerequisite for ideal love is freedom from tyranny, from physical bonds, from imperiousness, from social convention and from the claims of Cash. But such love is impossible: "Love bears within its breast the very germ/ of change...." (XIV, xciv). This realization lies at the centre of any explanation of Byron's attitude towards love. While it is true that he recognizes the qualities of ideal love, he also appreciates that an ideal male-female relationship is a form of perfection that it is impossible to achieve in an imperfect world. It exists, but its existence is an illusion, a "mere hallucination"; for true love is a recreation of Paradise, a virtual impossibility in a world of transience and mutability:

O Love! O Glory! what are you who fly
 Around us ever, rarely to alight?
 There's not a meteor in the Polar sky
 Of such transcendent and more fleeting flight.
 Chill, and chain'd to cold earth, we lift on high
 Our eyes in search of either lovely light;
 A thousand and a thousand colours they
 Assume, then leave us on our freezing way.

(VII, i)

Byron, then, resolves the conflict with a solution that is close to negativistic despair. While he reserves his keenest weapons of scorn and ridicule for those less desirable forms of love, he handles ideal love with a more mellowed sense of isolation and alienation. Many attempts have been made by Byron's biographers and critics to explain his attitudes by reference to the havoc of his own life.⁹ Yet there seems to be deeply rooted in the poet's personality an essential melancholy that stems from a realization that perfection cannot exist in an imperfect world. What then, can one conclude about Byron's ambivalence toward love? While it may be apparent that Byron is praising love, it is also apparent that he is experiencing the realization of

⁹For example, Frederick Beaty says: "His [Byron's] concept of ideal love, for which he strove but in reality never achieved, explains much about the pattern of his promiscuous and often tempestuous liaisons" ["Byron's Concept of Ideal Love", *Keats-Shelley Journal*, XII (1963), p. 54].

¹⁰Gleckner, throughout his book Byron and the Ruins of Paradise, argues that the explanation lies in Byron's alienated vision of a God who dooms his creatures to a fallen world.

its illusory nature:

Oh, Love! thou art the very god of evil,
For, after all, we cannot call thee devil.

(II, ccv)

Both sides of the paradox are presented. There is also indication that Byron is being drawn into creating a religion of love, possibly out of sheer desperation. He is unable, however, to raise his feet far enough above the ground to forget the view of stark reality below. Thus he seeks refuge, here as elsewhere, in levity:

I hate inconstancy -- I loathe, detest,
Abhor, condemn, abjure the mortal made
Of such quicksilver clay that in his breast
No permanent foundations can be laid;
Love, constant love, has been my constant guest,
And yet last night, being at a masquerade,
I saw the prettiest creature, fresh from Milan,
Which gave me some sensations like a villain.

(II, ccix)

Evidence of Attitudes in Earlier Poetry

The attitudes towards women, marriage and love expressed in Don Juan are evident in many of Byron's earlier works. Most of the poet's Juvenalia and occasional pieces are noted for their sentimentality and their tendency to over-romanticize the poet's own experiences and emotions. There are, however, in the same poems signs of the flippancy and cynicism that are to form a major motif in Don Juan. Hints of the sarcastic contempt for women that permeates much of Don Juan are found in many of the early poems. At times there are mere touches of humor: "But here our climate

is so rigid, /That love itself is rather frigid" ("To a Lady"). Most likely this was just an idle thought at the time; yet it is interesting when considered in retrospect, having noted references in Don Juan to the "cold" English ladies in the "moral North". Sarcasm is apparent as Byron speaks of a realm of romantic dreams where "even woman's smiles are true" ("To Romance"). The hypocrisy of women who pretend to be virtuous is attacked in The Waltz: "Leads forth the ready dame, whose rising flush /Might once have been mistaken for a blush." Another target is woman's lack of constancy, as illustrated in these lines from "To Woman": "Fondly we hope 'twill last for aye, /When, lo! she changes in a day." Of even greater significance are the frequent attacks on marriage, many of which were made long before the marital problems of Byron himself. In "To Eliza" (1806), Byron comments: "Still I can't contradict, what so oft has been said, /'Though women are angels, yet wedlock's the devil." The Waltz (1812) contains some of Byron's most contemptuous remarks about marriage: "To you, ye husbands of ten years! whose brows /Ache with the annual tributes of a spouse." He considers a bachelor about to be married as a gentleman who is seeking "torments of life". As one might expect, the tempo of critical remarks increases after the marriage and separation of Byron and Annabella Milbanke. An echoing of the "wedlock-padlock" theme of Don Juan occurs in The Blues, a satire written in 1821 to attack intellectual ladies:

. . . for although we are two,
 Yet she somehow contrives that all things shall be done
 In a style which proclaims us eternally one.

What is important is the fact that flippant and cynical comments about women and marriage occur in Byron's work long before his own marriage problems occurred; his previously held opinions seem for him to be confirmed by the separation. Thus the attitudes in Don Juan cannot be explained solely in terms of the poet's embitterment over the events which led to his self-exile. Byron had for a long time been cynical about male-female relationships and about the permanence of the marriage bond. Even though this cynicism was sharpened by personal experience, it was not personal experience that created it.

The same ambivalence that has been noted in the attitudes towards women and love in Don Juan can be found in the earlier poems. In addition to numerous passages of levity and cynicism, there are others of unmatched tenderness and affection:

She walks in beauty, like the night
 Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
 And all that's best of dark and bright
 Meet in her aspect and her eyes:
 Thus mellow'd to that tender light
 Which heaven to gaudy day denies.

.
 And on that cheek, and o'er that brow,
 So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,
 The smiles that win, the tints that glow,
 But tell of days in goodness spent,
 A mind at peace with all below,
 A heart whose love is innocent!

Many references are made to ideal love, that "light from

heaven" given "To lift from earth our low desire" (The Giaour) Such love, however, is part of "The unreach'd Paradise of our despair." (Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, IV, cxxii). Mingled with the visions of ideal love is the melancholy arising from the inevitable realization that such an ideal is beyond reach. This melancholy is one of the dominant notes in Byron's love poetry. Writing in 1808, for example, the poet declares with yearning: "I cannot view my paradise /Without the wish of dwelling there." ("To a Lady") Paradise is not possible; it has been forever lost: "But could I be what I have been, /And could I see what I have seen" (Stanzas to a Lady on leaving England). Although the poetry of these early works is for the most part sentimental and immature, the essential attitudes that one associates with Don Juan are seen in their early stages.

One of Byron's better known lyrics, "Maid of Athens" presents the dichotomy clearly, as the poet pleads to "that lip I long to taste". Love brings with it both the joy of anticipation and the anguish of failure: "To dream of joy and wake to sorrow /Is doom'd to all who love or live" ("Thou art not false. . . ."). The melancholy of some of the earlier poems deepens into a negativistic mood that borders of dark pessimism:

Alas! it is delusion all:

The future cheats us from afar,

Nor can we be what we recall,

Nor dare we think on what we are.

("Stanzas for Music")

Near the end of his life, Byron's pessimism concerning love had reached its nadir:

The flowers and fruits of love are gone;
The worm, the canker, and the grief
Are mine alone!

("On this Day I Complete my Thirty-sixth Year")

This is the supreme vision of a man isolated and alienated from his own ideal.

Nowhere, however, are the attitudes towards women, marriage and love more fully expressed than in the cantos of Don Juan. Here in his masterpiece, Byron gives vent to all his feelings of frustration, bitterness and contempt that even time had failed to heal.

CHAPTER 3

A STUDY OF THE INDIVIDUAL WOMEN IN DON JUAN

The general characteristics of women, marriage, and love discussed in the previous chapter can be particularized by an analysis of the portions of the narrative dealing with man-woman relationships. A study of the individual women in the poem, and in particular of their relations with Juan, can reveal with greater clarity the poet's total concept of womankind. An analysis of the roles of the individual women is valuable only insofar as it contributes to an overall perspective. The satire, ridicule, or idealization of particular women is not the most significant factor to be analysed; rather it is the quality that the woman in question exhibits that needs to be examined. For Don Juan is not a poem about a series of women and affairs in the life of the hero, any more than it is an autobiographical account of affairs in Byron's own life. It is in fact a particularizing of general characteristics found in women, (and noticed in passing during stanzas of commentary), characteristics which in the poet's opinion need to be singled out for praise or blame. Thus a study of the women in the poem, even with total disregard for the biographical data, can produce fruitful results; the biographical information serves merely to sharpen the focus, to stamp the mark of certainty on

conclusions that are in themselves convincing.

A. Hypocrisy and Deception: The Spanish and English Ladies.

The hypocrisy and deception that surround male-female relationship is a major concern of Byron. These undesirable characteristics generally arise from either the motives that lie behind love relationships and marriage, or the activities of scheming women who are usually themselves the product of an unsuccessful union. Nowhere are these characteristics painted more vividly by the poet than in the Spanish and English cantos.

The first woman to have any significant influence on young Juan's life is his mother, the talented Donna Inez. Inez, a learned lady of excelling virtue, outstanding memory, great mathematical ability, and uprightness of moral character, is marked by an excessive sense of self-righteousness. Byron portrays her with strong satiric strokes, employing levity, humour, and contempt. Having sung her praises for several stanzas, he concludes with the couplet:

To other's share let 'female error fall,'
For she had not even one--the worst of all.
(I, xvi)

While it is true that the contempt is frequently mollified with humour, the prevailing tone is nevertheless contemptuous. Consider, for example, the following passage:

Oh! She was perfect past all parallel--
 Of any modern female saint's comparison;
 So far above the cunning powers of hell,
 Her guardian angel had given up his garrison;
 (I, xvii)

Unfortunately, her perfection by its very nature excludes
 love; thus, her husband Don José succumbs, and "like a lineal
 son of Eve, /Went plucking various fruit without her leave."
 (I, xviii)

The difficulties between Donna Inez and her husband
 are intended to emphasize one of Byron's objections about
 marriage--the union of a man with an intellectually superior
 woman. Such women had been the objects of Byron's satirical
 barbs in earlier works; for example, in The Blues, Inkel
 makes this comment concerning a possible marriage between
 Tracy and Miss Lilac:

... I can't say I know any happy alliance
 Which has lately sprung up from a wedlock with
 science.
 She's so learned in all things, and fond of
 concerning
 Herself in all matters connected with learning.
 (71-74)

Similarly in this case, Byron blames the failure of the
 marriage of Inez and José on the intellectual superiority of
 the wife, generalizing the situation in the famous couplet:

But--Oh! ye lords of ladies intellectual,
 Inform us truly, have they not hen-peck'd
 you all?
 (I, xxii)

Don José's unfaithfulness is a natural consequence, we
 are led to believe, of a marriage without love. Yet it is

interesting to note that Byron seems to be applying a double standard here. The reader is not led to point the finger at the husband, who is presented as the careless kind, the victim of his wife's attempts to get him into scrapes. The husband can cheat, but the same privilege is not extended to his wife. What a fall there is when we learn that beneath that polished veneer of perfectibility, there is a flaw! And what pleasure and satisfaction the poet has in exposing it!

Some people whisper (but, no doubt, they lie,
 For malice still imputes some private end)
 That Inez had, ere Don Alfonso's marriage,
 Forgot with him her very prudent carriage;
 (I, lxvi)

While it can be argued that the poet is harsh on Inez because of the hypocritical position she has taken, the fact still remains that he is much less severe on the husband who is committing the same offence. Indeed, Byron has no further dealings with Don José, as he dies, leaving the noble Donna Inez in sole charge of their son, young Juan. Here the poet becomes most critical and biting in his satire. In his first reference to the mother's views on her son's education, he uses a typical technique--the anticlimax at the end of a stanza, which produces the effect of undercutting the apparent seriousness of what precedes:

Sagest of women, even of widows, she
 Resolved that Juan should be quite a paragon,
 And worthy of the noblest pedigree:

(His sire was of Castile, his dam from Aragon);
 Then for accomplishments of chivalry,
 In case our lord the king should go to war again,
 He learn'd the arts of riding, fencing, gunnery,
 And how to scale a fortress--or a nunnery.

(I, xxxviii)

By switching the point of view in the last line, Byron gives
 a brief forecast of his later treatment of Donna Inez.

The emphasis in Juan's education is on moral breeding,
 which is as remote as possible from the realities of life;
 he is to learn

The languages, especially the dead,
 The sciences, and most of all the abstruse,
 The arts, at least all such as could be said
 To be the most remote from common use,

(I, xl)

Inez herself acts as censor, cutting out undesirable
 passages, especially anything that might hint "continuation
 of the species"; even the family Missal, decorated with
 kissing figures, is kept from his tender sight. It is in
 this area that Inez commits her major crime: an attempt to
 destroy her son's natural spirit. This attitude on the
 part of Donna Inez may possibly explain Juan's actions
 later; for "the entire poem may be read as a richly humorous
 investigation of the results stemming from a canting,
 maternal education which attempted to deny the very physical

foundations of life."¹

Hypocrisy is indeed the chief characteristic of Donna Inez. This hypocrisy is most evident in relation to the affair between her son and Donna Julia. The mother knows what is going on; whatever she is, she is not naive. Her passivity is most inconsistent when one recalls her concern for Juan's moral upbringing; indeed, her passivity contributes significantly to the flourishing of the affair. The hint of an earlier relationship between Inez and Alfonso heightens the hypocrisy of the situation, and provides a possible motive for the mother's strange behavior. She fails to live up to her own standard of conduct, for which Byron cannot forgive her. He is merciless in his handling of her hypocritical contradictions; and on a broader scale, he extends his condemnation to the hypocrisies of society, presenting us with one of the many glimpses of what Andrew Rutherford calls "the disreputable murky motives in respectable society".² Inez' reaction to the bedroom farce is typical of her hypocrisy:

¹E.J. Lovell, "Irony and Image in Don Juan", in *English Romantic Poets*, ed. M.H. Abrams (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 231.

²Andrew Rutherford, *Byron A Critical Study* (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1961), p. 146.

But Donna Inez, to divert the train
 Of one of the most circulating scandals
 That had for centuries been known in Spain,
 At least since the retirement of the vandals,
 First vow'd (and never had she vow'd in vain)
 To Virgin Mary several pounds of candles;
 (I, cxc)

The solution that she proposes is ludicrous: Julia, who has deceived herself with the illusion of spiritual love, is sent to a convent to live a spiritual life; Juan, meanwhile, is sent off "to mend his former morals, and get new". And the worthy Donna Inez takes up the teaching of Sunday School, a fact that Byron handles with masterful irony: "The great success of Juan's education /Spurr'd her to teach another generation." (II, x)

Donna Inez is reintroduced briefly in Canto X through a letter that she has written to Juan who is now in Russia. She informs him that she has remarried, and that she has another son. The crowning touch is applied by Byron as he shows the mother praising the now dissipated Juan, and proclaiming her delight that he is now finished with "Those pleasures after which wild youth will hanker." Even the poet-persona finds this too much to take, as he launches out with a full-scale attack on hypocrisy (X, xxxiv).

There can be no doubt that Byron is merciless in his treatment of Donna Inez, to such an extent, indeed, that one is forced to ask why. The answer may be found in the

author's own personal life.³ Yet there is another possible answer. In his portrayal of Donna Inez, the poet wishes the reader to observe one of the most undesirable traits of women--the pontifical self-righteousness which dominates and controls the lives of other individuals. No doubt Byron personally knew women like this; however, it is the quality itself, rather than any particular woman, that Byron wishes to ridicule. His aim is to reveal in vivid narrative terms a characteristic in womankind that he, as a man, finds especially revolting.

Juan's initial experience of love is with Donna Julia, a beautiful young woman who has the great misfortune to be married to a much older man, a fact seen by Byron as a major cause of breakdown of marriage. The relationship between Julia and her husband is far from happy, as the partners merely tolerate each other:

They lived together as most people do,
Suffering each other's foibles by accord,
And not exactly either one or two;

(I, lxx)

Julia's main function in the narrative is to serve as the cause of Juan's initial fall from sexual innocence. Byron

³Several critics have interpreted the character of Donna Inez in terms of biographical parallels: Paul Trueblood, in The Flowering of Byron's Genius, explores the parallel between Inez and Annabella, a view also supported by C. Fuess in Lord Byron as a Satirist in Verse; Marchand, in Byron's Poetry, sees Inez as a combination of Byron's wife and mother.

dwells briefly on Juan's complete lack of understanding of what is happening to him: "But as for Juan, he had no more notion /Than he who never saw the sea of ocean." (I, lxx) Victimized by his naivety, he is even more the victim of circumstances beyond his control: "Juan is victimized as much by a complicated network of social relationships of which he has no knowledge and which do not directly concern him." Chief among these is his own mother, Donna Inez, who has brought her son into contact with Julia for reasons of her own:

She had some other motive much more near
For leaving Juan to this new temptation,
Perhaps to open Don Alfonso's eyes,
In case he thought his wife too great a prize.

(I, ci)

Her passivity, most hypocritical when one considers her earlier concern for her son's moral upbringing, contributes to the illicit affair.

As for Julia, her motives remain ambiguous:

I can't tell whether Julia saw the affair
With other people's eyes, or if her own
Discoveries made, but none could be aware
Of this, at least no symptom e'er was shown;
Perhaps she did not know, or did not care,
Indifferent from the first, or callous grown:
I'm really puzzled what to think or say,
She kept her counsel in so close a way.

(I, lxviii)

Byron knows very well what is happening to her, and there

Karl Kroeber, *Romantic Narrative Art* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1960), p. 150.

is little doubt that Julia understands as well. She is no "sweet young thing" but a deceiver in her own right. While it may seem that Byron creates the impression of naivety on the part of both lovers, this impression is superficial and thinly conceals the poet's contempt for Julia. Consider the following stanza:

Poor Julia's heart was in an awkward state;
 She felt it going, and resolved to make
 The noblest effort for herself and mate,
 For honour's, pride's, religion's, virtue's sake.
 Her resolutions were most truly great,
 And almost might have made a Tarquin quake:
 She pray'd the Virgin Mary for her grace,
 As being the best judge of a lady's case.

(I, lxxv)

All the while Byron is laughing. The prayers to the Virgin might seem serious, but the intention is facetious. For the next stanza closes with this couplet: "'Tis surely Juan now--No! I'm afraid /That night the Virgin was no longer pray'd." And the next reference to the Virgin occurs near the end of the Canto when Donna Inez sends her wayward son abroad, first having vowed the "Virgin Mary several pounds of candles."

Julia tries to conceal what she must know is in her heart by pathetic attempts at rationalizing: "Love, then, but love within its proper limits /Was Julia's innocent determination" (I, lxxxi). The irony and scorn towards Julia is again apparent in these lines:

Julia had honour, virtue, truth, and love
 For Don Alfonso; and she inly swore
 By all the vows below to powers above,
 She never would disgrace the ring she wore,
 (I, cix)

Juan, meanwhile, is suffering from a romantic melancholy,
 "Dissatisfied, nor knowing what he wanted." He just is not
 equal to the task of dealing with such a situation.⁵

Byron's treatment of Julia and her gradual concession
 gives one the impression that he is playing "cat and mouse"
 with his character, and enjoying every minute of it:

But who, alas! can love and then be wise?
 Not that remorse did not oppose temptation;
 A little still she strove, and much repented,
 And whispering 'I will ne'er consent'--consented.
 (I, cxvii)

The poet is merciless in his treatment of Julia's self-
 deceiving Platonism;⁶ but he is equally merciless in his
 treatment of Julia herself. The critics read perhaps more
 sympathy for Julia into Byron's intentions than is actually
 there; for Byron treats her with humorous contempt. Those
 apparent sympathetic tendencies can frequently be seen as
 examples of irony. Consider, for instance, the following

⁵Lovell blames this on his upbringing: "Because Juan
 has been so ill-educated, he is correspondingly ill-equipped
 to deal with Julia. . . ." ["Irony and Image in Don Juan",
 p. 231].

⁶Marchand argues that "it is Platonism rather than
 Julia which gets the trouncing" [Byron's Poetry, p. 172].
 Lovell suggests that she is "a woman betrayed originally into
 marriage with an old man, led deliberately into a trap by
 Inez, and sentenced finally by society. . . ." ["Irony and
 Image. . . .", p. 237].

stanza dealing with the bedroom farce (Don Alfonso has just left, having searched the room in vain):

No sooner was it bolted, then--Oh shame!
 Oh sin! Oh sorrow! and Oh womankind!
 How can you do such things and keep your fame,
 Unless this world, and t'other too, be blind?
 (I, clxv)

There is no denying the humorous treatment here; on the surface at any rate the tone is mock-serious. However, it is reasonable to assume that Byron is quite serious and is saying exactly what he means. Julia is certainly presented during the entire bedroom scene as a scheming, conniving seducer. The intention, it seems, is not only to ridicule the hypocrisy of the whole situation, but also to express part of that contempt for women that pervades the entire poem. Consider also Julia's reaction when Don Alfonso comes to seek an apology for having "falsely" suspected her. How cool and how calculating she has become! It prompts Byron to write of women in general:

They blush, and we believe them, at least I
 Have always done so; 'tis of no great use,
 In any case, attempting a reply,
 For then their eloquence grows quite profuse;
 And when at length they're out of breath, they sigh,
 And cast their languid eyes down, and let loose
 A tear or two, and then we make it up;
 And then--and then--and then--sit down and sup.
 (I, clxxix)

Julia even has the gall to set down certain conditions for acceptance of her husband's apologies. Only his discovery of the truth prevents her making a fool of him any further.

An important part of any discussion of the role of

Donna Julia is the farewell letter, its contents, and its final disposition. Many critics see the letter as sincere, and use it to support the contention that Julia is handled with sympathy.⁷ A few go so far as to admit of some possible contemptuous tone, but to a very limited extent.⁸ The letter can be seen as an expression of a woman's attitude towards love, as Byron sees it. Although one can argue that there is at least a trace of sympathy in the letter, such sympathy is hardly sufficiently powerful to support the view that Byron understands the female heart. Indeed, the sympathy borders on pity, and pity is often a form of contempt. It is very difficult to take Byron seriously, or to know whether he means to be serious. This is true of these "sympathetic" tendencies; for example, when Julia claims that woman has but one resource, "To love again, and be again undone", one

⁷Hugh Walker feels that the letter is "seriously meant and profoundly felt" [English Satire and Satirists (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1925), p. 270]. Marchand considers it "sincere and true" [Byron's Poetry, p. 176]. Kroeber speaks of the "pity of Julia's position" [Romantic Narrative Art, p. 151]. C.M. Bowra refers to the letter as "genuine and noble sentiment which is nonetheless fine because it rises not from actual experience but from longing for an ideal" ["Don Juan", in British Romantic Poets, ed. S.Kumar (New York: New York University Press, 1966), p. 195].

⁸One such critic is George Ridenour: "The tone is one of quiet, almost tender mockery. But Julia is not permitted to be merely pathetic. The rather indulgent self-pity of the letter itself, and the elegance of its appearance suggest that Julia is well aware of the dramatic possibilities of her situation and is determined to play the part to the hilt" [The Style of 'Don Juan' (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), p. 79].

cannot but wonder whether the man who wrote the lines had an underlying ironic intention.

As Juan leaves his native land never to see Julia again, he rereads her letter and expresses his sentiments in glowing terms:

And oh! if e'er I should forget, I swear--
 But that's impossible, and cannot be--
 Sooner shall this blue ocean melt to air,
 Sooner shall earth resolve itself to sea,
 Than I resign thine image, oh, my fair!
 Or think of anything excepting thee;

(II, xix)

But poor Juan is very quickly forced to think of something else, as the physical world intrudes into his romantic musings; Juan becomes sea-sick. The following stanza is typical of Byron's technique, as he juxtaposes remarks about Juan's devotion with the growing physical discomforts of seasickness; every profound statement is reduced to absurdity:

'Sooner shall heaven kiss earth--(here he fell sicker)
 Oh, Julia! what is every other woe?--
 (For God's sake let me have a glass of liquor;
 Pedro, Battista, help me down below.)
 Julia, my love--(you rascal, Pedro, quicker)-
 Oh, Julia!--(this curst vessel pitches so)-
 Beloved Julia, hear me still beseeching!
 (Here he grew inarticulate with retching.)

(II, xx)

Then, too, one needs to consider the disposition of the letter, as the fine sentiments therein are reduced to lots for cannibalistic designs:

At length the lots were torn up, and prepared,
 But of materials that must shock the Muse--
 Having no paper, for the want of better,
 They took by force from Juan Julia's letter.

(II, lxxiv)

The debunking of the emotion expressed in the letter is difficult to explain, especially if one interprets the contents of the letter as essentially a sincere expression of love.⁹ No doubt there is a trace of tenderness in the letter itself; but the mockery that is effected by the use to which the letter is eventually put, serves to cancel it out almost completely. Julia's "love" for Juan was a sham, characterized by hypocrisy and deception to such an extent that true emotion could not flourish. The sentiment in the letter, rather than being tender and true, is shallow and false; in retrospect, the irony becomes bitter. This view is shared to some extent by E. J. Lovell, who claims that the function of the treatment of the letter is "to strip the tinsel savagely and finally from false sentiment and reveal it for what it is."¹⁰ Another aspect of this whole question is reflected in Juan himself. The sea-sickness episode and the final use of the letter can be seen as an attack on the

⁹Marchand sees the seasick scene as "a typical example of Byron's ironic method of deflating fine sentiment" [Poetry, p.174]. Hugh Walker also assumes a sympathetic treatment of Julia, claiming that "the root of his cynicism is the doctrine that the petty, the contemptible and the base will always be found close to the heroic and the pathetic" [English Satire and Satirists, p. 271].

¹⁰Lovell, "Irony and Image. . . .", p.232.

hero's naive assumption that his love for Julia is permanent, a claim which in the poet's opinion is absurd and deceptive.

What, then, is Julia's role in the poem? Is Byron's purpose to "put into Julia's passion his ideal of what such a thing should be"?¹¹ This presupposes that the whole Julia affair has an ideal quality; yet if one examines the total context of the relationship, one is forced to conclude that Julia is deceptive and shrewd, and goes into the romance "with both eyes open." Coupled with this is the fact of the behind-the-scenes scheming on the part of Donna Inez, who encourages the affair despite her prudish attitude concerning her son's education. The whole situation can hardly be classed as "ideal". Rather, the object of Byron's satire is the stark reality of the matter. If one considers the portrayal of the women in Don Juan as specific attempts to present undesirable (or desirable) characteristics of women in the aggregate, then, Julia can be seen as a partner of an unhappy marriage, a victim of an unscrupulous woman, a practitioner of deceit and hypocrisy, and a pursuer of an innocent youth.

The English adventures of Don Juan are somewhat reminiscent of the Spanish episode in that hypocrisy is once again a powerful element. This time, however, the young hero has the dubious advantage of experience behind him to

¹¹Bowra, "Don Juan", p. 194.

fortify him against attack. The hypocrisy in the English cantos, however, is more socially-centred than was the case in Seville, where hypocrisy revolved around a particular character. Indeed the technique now used succeeds in "exploring the inconsistency between the individual's inclinations and the demands of his social role."¹² Society is much more influential here, and because that society is much more mobile, the confusion between appearance and reality is more complex. Indeed, the dichotomy is central to the whole episode. In a series of adventures that begin with the attempted robbery in "Freedom's chosen station" and ends with the frolics of a most sensuous Duchess garbed in spiritual robes, Byron exposes pretense as "the pervading rottenness of an entire culture."¹³ The hypocrisy which he is to particularize in the ladies of English society is generalized in the revelation of the imperfection of England's boasted freedom and morality: "The later cantos of Don Juan bristle with satire of social and political abuses, British foreign policy, statesmen, diplomats, and military heroes. Byron's ultimate objective in all this criticism of England and things English appears to be to show how imperfect is the boasted freedom and morality of

¹²Kroeber, Romantic Narrative Art, p. 160.

¹³Lovell, "Irony and Image. . . .", p. 235.

England."¹⁴ As one would expect, many critics have read much significance in the English cantos because of Byron's personal experiences with English society. It is true that the autobiographical element is especially strong in the later cantos.¹⁵ Yet, here again, it is possible to discuss the women separate from any possible parallels that can be drawn with actual English ladies, and to find in them general characteristics that shed light on Byron's attitude towards women and love. The characteristics that the poet is concerned with in the English cantos are hypocrisy, complacency in marriage, and deception.

At the centre of Don Juan's social life in England is Lady Adeline Amundeville, Byron's "most complex and interesting heroine."¹⁶ Adeline is introduced as "The fair most fatal Juan ever met", with hints of a role she was intended to play as "Destiny and Passion spread the net." She is a most graceful social performer, the centre of much attention: "Sweet Adeline, amidst the gay world's hum,/ Was the Queen-Bee, the glass of all that's fair;" (XIII,xiii) Yet even as Byron describes points in Adeline's favor, his

¹⁴ Trueblood, The Flowering of Byron's Genius, p. 13.

¹⁵ T.G. Steffan warns against using these cantos as social history ["The Twice Two Thousand", in The Making of a Masterpiece, Vol. 1 of Byron's 'Don Juan': a Variorum Edition, ed. Steffan & Pratt (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1957), pp. 267-8].

¹⁶ L. Marchand, Byron's Poetry, p. 219.

general attitude toward women cannot be suppressed; as he concludes the same stanza:

Whose charms made all men speak, and women dumb.
The last's a miracle, and such was reckon'd,
And since that time there has not been a second.
(XIII, xiii)

Adeline is married to Lord Henry Amundeville, a man "she had loved well", a typically cool, imperturbable and proud English gentleman who "liked to be superior". Her virtue is so great that she has had no occasion to shield herself against temptation:

But Adeline had not the least occasion
For such a shield, which leaves but little merit
To virtue proper, or good education.
Her chief resource was in her own high spirit,
Which judged mankind at their due estimation;
(XIII, xxxi)

One is constantly reminded of Donna Julia in such stanzas; indeed, it seems that the poet wishes the reader to make such a connection as he hints that this Adeline is only a front for the true creature:

But Adeline was not indifferent; for
(Now for a commonplace!) beneath the snow,
As a volcano holds the lava more
Within--et cetera. . . .
(XIII, xxxvi)

Lord Henry and Lady Adeline entertain at Norman Abbey, an occasion which Byron uses to expose the general superficiality of the English social circle, "the twice two thousand, for whom the earth was made". The ladies who attend the party become the butt of the poet's jokes: there is Mrs. Sleep, "Who look'd a white lamb, yet was a black

sheep"; there were "Countesses of Blank--but rank". The emphasis on money, the sole passport to this world of leisure and luxury, is ironically lauded:

Witness the lands which 'flow'd with milk and honey',
 Held out unto the hungry Israelites:
 To this we have added since, the love of money,
 The only sort of pleasure which requites.
 Youth fades, and leaves our days no longer sunny;
 We tire of mistresses and parasites;
 But oh, ambrosial cash! Ah! who would lose thee?
 When we no more can use, or even abuse thee!

(XIII, c)

Lady Adeline's first personal concern for Don Juan develops as a result of the Duchess of Fitz-Fulke, a voluptuous lady whose exploits "were ticklish ground". The Duchess serves as a direct foil to Adeline, in that her Grace is uninhibited and has a brashness that contains neither hypocrisy nor subtlety. Adeline is distressed at the possibility that this woman might be interested in a "dead set" at Juan; her concern, she is certain, is that of a mother for her son. After all, she is older!

These forty days' advantage of her years--
 And hers were those which can face calculation,

 Gave her a right to have maternal fears
 For a young gentleman's fit education,

(XIV, lii)

She has the added advantages of a proper background, experience, and conduct so correct that the gossips "could not even glean the slightest splinters /From off the marble". Thus she is very determined to take measures to prevent the development of any scandalous relationship between the Duchess and the young Spaniard. Her solution to the problem

is Juan's marriage:

She thought upon the subject twice or thrice,
And morally decided, the best state is
For morals, marriage; and this question carried,
She seriously advised him to get married.

(XV, xxix)

Consequently Adeline undertakes to find a suitable mate, and Byron takes advantage of the situation to satirize the general tendency among society women for match-making:

Next to the making matches for herself,
And daughters, brothers, sisters, kith or kin,
Arranging them like books on the same shelf,
There's nothing women love to dabble in
More (like a stock-holder in growing pelf)
Than match-making in general. . . .

(XV, xxxi)

With detached amusement the poet lists the candidates that occur to Adeline as she ponders the whole matter with great concern for Juan's moral well-being. It is in this context that Adeline represents yet another example of hypocrisy. This encouragement of marriage comes, as one would expect, from a woman who is part of an ideal union. Yet this is what we are told: "Their union was a model to behold, / Serene and noble,--conjugal, but cold" (XIV, lxxxvi). The cool indifference that is the essence of the relationship between Adeline and her husband is illustrated by Henry's actions of affection toward her: "as he went out, calmly kiss'd her, /Less like a young wife than an aged sister".

For someone who "had seen the world and stood its test", Adeline is sadly lacking in one characteristic: self-understanding. This is revealed in the ambiguity with

which the poet speaks of her: "She loved her lord, or thought so"; or again, "She knew not her own heart", and "I think not she was then in love with Juan". Adeline's refusal to admit to herself that she is falling in love with Juan is evidently a point against her. Like Julia in the Spanish cantos, Adeline fails to recognize the physical basis of love, and lives under a veil of the worst possible self-deception. She is, however, to pay for this, for restraint can only lead to an explosive release of emotion at a later date. Such restraint as she displays is "won at the price of bottling up and suppressing the emotions beneath a layer of ice, thus doubly distilling them and ironically intensifying their explosive qualities."¹⁷

B. Power and Lust: Gulbeyaz and Catherine.

Love in its many forms and viewed from several angles permeates the whole of Don Juan. Equally dominant are the episodes which illustrate the debasement of love to lust, quest for power, sexual abandon, deceit, and jealousy, providing "a constant reminder of man's loss of his essential humanity."¹⁸ The themes of domination and sexual abandon are nowhere more apparent than in the Turkish and Russian cantos, particularly in the portrayals of Gulbeyaz and Catherine.

Byron's chief concern in his total presentation of

¹⁷Lovell, "Irony and Image. . . .", p. 238

¹⁸Gleckner, Byron and the Ruins of Paradise, p. 373.

love is with the prerequisites to successful love, one of these is freedom. Any attempt to restrain love, to force it into a preconceived mold, is criminal and can only result in corruption of that fine emotion. Love must be free in order to realize its fullest potential. In *Gulbeyaz* we see the essence of this particular view, and a representation of yet another trait in the female character that Byron finds especially objectionable--the desire of women for domination. Once love becomes a command, he stresses, it is no longer love. Byron is a strong advocate of freedom, and nowhere is this better illustrated than in the scene when young Don Juan rejects the Sultana's advances. *Gulbeyaz* has turned to Juan for sexual pleasure, and he proclaims:

The prison'd eagle will not pair, nor I
Serve a sultana's sensual phantasy.

Thou ask'st, if I can love? be this the proof
How much I have loved--that I love not thee!
In this vile garb, the distaff, web, and woof,
Were fitter for me: Love is for the free!

(V, cxxvi-cxxvii)

With these remarks, Juan not only resists the temptations of a woman whose beauty is "of that overpowering kind", but also risks his life: her wealth and power are equalled only by her determination to have her own way. As E.J. Lovell suggests, *Gulbeyaz* "represents the final self-deception of one who thinks that love, the free gift of self-surrender, may be bought and commanded."¹ Her faults cancel out all

¹ Lovell, "Irony and Image. . . .", p. 234.

of her better qualities: "She has the charm of her passion's intensity, but her love is a form of imperial, or imperious, bondage, her embrace a chain thrown about her lover's neck."²⁰

As with the Spanish and English women, Byron resorts again to satirical barbs and contemptuous scorn in his portrait of a woman. After Juan bursts into tears on recollecting the idyllic life with Haidee, Gulbeyaz is shocked--but not at the tears, "For women shed and use them at their liking". Rather it is her own egotism that produces the shock:

And she would have consoled, but knew not how:
 Having no equals, nothing which had e'er
 Infected her with sympathy till now,
 And never having dreamt what 'twas to bear
 Aught of a serious, sorrowing kind, although
 There might arise some pouting petty care
 To cross her brow, she wonder'd how so near
 Her eyes another eye could shed a tear.

(V, cxix)

Her angry reaction at being rejected is handled skillfully, as Byron apparently is forced to grope for a simile adequate to describe the sultana's condition. He compares her to a "tigress robb'd of young", and her rage to "a short glimpse of hell". He makes the statement general in its application when he refers to the "distress /Of ladies who cannot have their own way." It is significant that he uses the plural form here, for it supports the contention that it is not the individual woman that Byron is concerned with but the

²⁰Bloom, The Visionary Company, p. 261.

traits that she represents. The poet traces carefully Gulbeyaz's emotional condition which is a direct consequence of her rejection:

Her first thought was to cut off Juan's head;
 Her second, to cut only his--acquaintance;
 Her third, to ask him where he had been bred;
 Her fourth, to rally him into repentance;
 Her fifth, to call her maids and go to bed;
 Her sixth, to stab herself; her seventh, to sentence
 The lash to Baba:--but her grand resource
 Was to sit down again, and cry of course.

(V, cxxxix)

The husband of Gulbeyaz is a powerful Turkish sultan with many wives and concubines. Byron interjects what would seem to be a note of sympathy for the pathos of Gulbeyaz's situation:

For, were the Sultan just to all his dears,
 She could but claim the fifteen-hundredth part
 Of what should be monopoly--the heart.

(VI, ix)

This sympathy should not, however, be taken too seriously, as Byron is quick to reduce it a few stanzas further on:

Polygamy may well be held in dread,
 Not only as a sin, but as a bore:
 Most wise men with one moderate woman wed,
 Will scarcely find philosophy for more;

(VI, xii)

Although one may argue that Gulbeyaz is portrayed as a victim, one must concede that the portrayal is marked by contempt.

Some critics of Don Juan see the sultana as a scheming hypocrite.²¹ The whole episode does indeed reveal

²¹Ridenour goes so far as to consider that she "provides as close an approximation to the satanic as one might wish" [The Style of 'Don Juan', p. 82].

the discrepancy between the character's actions and feelings, Gulbeyaz' method of getting young Juan into her presence reflects a form of bondage to the demands of her social role. The disguise into which Juan is forced reflects the greater deception that permeates the whole episode, that of tyranny disguised as love. If man is not free to express himself as he wishes, he is enslaved-- a further emphasis of the freedom theme. Indeed, Byron makes a broader application of this theme to life itself. As Lovell notes, "Life itself is impossible without freedom, however attractive a loving or benevolent despot may seem to be, or whatever luxuries may seem to surround the 'escape from freedom'."²² The strong objection to tyranny that Gulbeyaz symbolizes cancels out any suggestion of sympathy on the part of the poet for her situation!

So deep an anguish wrung Gulbeyaz' brow:
Her cheek turn'd ashes, ears rung, brain whirl'd round,
As if she had received a sudden blow,

Gulbeyaz proved in that brief agony
What she could ne'er express--then how should I?

(VI, cv-cvi)

By reducing the "agony" to a flippant statement, Byron sweeps away the possibility of sympathy that seems to have been raised at the outset. The function of Gulbeyaz in the narrative is not to indicate sympathy for the feminine position, but to express contempt for certain aspects of the

²²Lovell, "Irony and Image. . . .", p. 234.

feminine character.

In the court of Catherine, "Russia's royal harlot", Don Juan moves from one tyrant to another. Indeed, Catherine can be seen as an extension of Gulbeyaz, representing what one critic calls "absolute power in its most tyrannical form, both on the battlefield and in the bedroom."²³ The difference lies mainly with Juan. Whereas he had vehemently rejected at the risk of his life the passionate advances of Gulbeyaz, he finds himself submitting to the servitude of Catherine quite willingly. This is perhaps Juan's greatest moral fall. He has moved far enough away from the influence of the idyllic episode with Haidee to be able to succumb to the sickening lust of a glorified prostitute.

The chief characteristics of Byron's Catherine are ambition and lust.²⁴ We are introduced to her as the fair lady for whose pastime "carcasses, . . . lay as thick as thatch o'er silenced cities." Her greatest joy "Was a ta'en city, thirty thousand slain". Her sexual activities were as ambitious and varied as her military endeavours:

²³ Joseph, Byron the Poet, p. 245.

²⁴ It has been suggested that Byron lacked knowledge of the historical Catherine. But Byron "makes no pretense to historical accuracy and is concerned with things he does know, the nature of women and the weakness of man" [Marchand, Byron's Poetry, p. 207].

The courtiers stared, the ladies whisper'd, and
 The empress smiled: the reigning favourite frown'd--
 I quite forget which of them was in hand
 Just then; as they are rather numerous found,
 (IX, xlvi)

Byron views Catherine's interest in Juan as merely another conquest:

Oh Catherine! (for of all interjections,
 To thee both oh! and ah! belong of right
 In love and war) how odd are the connexions
 Of human thoughts, which jostle in their flight!
 Just now yours were cut out in different sections:
First Ismail's capture caught your fancy quite;
Next of new knights, the fresh and glorious batch;
And thirdly he who brought you the despatch!
 (IX, lxv)

As Trueblood states, "her amours are as ruthless and exacting as her military operations."²⁵ Byron treats Catherine rather harshly, especially in his handling of her "predicament" after Juan is sent to England for reasons of his health. He refers to the empress as "lucky" in that she is able to overcome her problem of finding a worthy successor in a relatively short period of time!

But to continue: though her years were waning,
 Her climacteric teased her like her teens;
 And though her dignity brook'd no complaining,
 So much did Juan's setting off distress her,
 She could not find at first a fit successor.

But time, the comforter, will come at last;
 And four-and-twenty hours, and twice that number
 Of candidates requesting to be placed,
 Made Catherine taste next night a quiet slumber:-
 (X, xlvii-xlviii)

Yet Byron's treatment of Catherine is not as severe as the

²⁵Trueblood, The Flowering of Byron's Genius, p. 106.

satire directed at Donna Inez through the introduction of her letter to her son congratulating him on his successes. "Gross as Catherine's appetites are, they are not so reprehensible as the hypocrisy of Inez' letter."²⁶ Indeed, the relationship between Catherine and Juan is open, and free of the hypocrisy and deceit that clouded the Donna Julia affair.

Byron's chief concern in the Catherine episode, however, is not so much with the Empress and her sexual appetites as with Don Juan and his self-love:

He, on the other hand, if not in love,
Fell into that no less imperious passion,
Self-love--

(IX, lxxviii)

Such love is vanity, "Selfish in its beginning as its end". In spite of all the attention and flattery that Don Juan receives from Catherine, he falls ill. The implication is clear: mere physical love, no matter what the source, will eventually sicken even the most ardent and passionate lover. It is interesting to note that immediately following the final satiric attack on Catherine, Byron introduces a rather moving passage in which we are permitted to view Juan in a much more favourable light. The reader can examine Juan's feelings about the Turkish orphan Leila, whom he had rescued from the ruins of Ismael. These feelings are in direct contrast to the lust and pride that dominated the affair of

²⁶Lovell, "Irony and Image. . . .", p. 235.

Juan with the Russian empress, whose military exploits had brought Leila almost to death. There may even be significance in the fact that Juan is attracted to an unfortunate victim of the very woman whose amours were dissipating him. Byron finds it difficult to classify the relationship, or the love that Juan feels for Leila, stating clearly that it is based neither on parental affection or sensual desire. There is a strong hint that it may be part of that "self-love" to which Juan has already succumbed:

He loved the infant orphan he had saved,
As patriots (now and then) may love a nation;
His pride, too, felt that she was not enslaved
Owing to him;

(X, lv)

In spite of this, however, the relationship seems to be a close one, in direct contrast to both the Gulbeyaz and Catherine affairs.

Byron does not treat the Catherine affair with the same elaborate detail that he employs in most of the others. Possibly the episode is played down because it is a forerunner of the much more important encounters with the English ladies; indeed, the Russian experience gives Juan a view of the seamy side of life and provides him with a wisdom that will equip him for his dealings with the women at Norman Abbey. Certainly the period of dissipation in the life of the hero is handled with less frankness, detail,

and emphasis than was given to the earlier affairs.²⁷ A very likely explanation for this is that Byron handles this particular episode less effectively because it is the only one of the love affairs where the hero must share part of the responsibility; Juan succumbed to self-love. Byron feels much more comfortable working with material where his hero is completely a victim of deceitful and conniving women.

C. The Ideal: Haidee and Aurora Raby.

In discussing the question of whether Byron was a "Romantic" poet, Leslie Marchand claims that "one may be so constituted as to long for the ideal with an uncompromising zeal, and may be consequently disappointed and unhappy because the real fails to measure up to it, yet be too clear-sighted to confuse the two. He may then vary his mental occupations between a dwelling upon the ideal, which is his only true love, and a melancholy or a bitterly mocking reflection upon how disgustingly short of the ideal the real is and must always be."²⁸ These remarks adequately summarize the problem with which Byron grapples in his presentation of Haidee, and, to a lesser degree, of Aurora Raby. The handling of the Haidee episode in particular indicates a realization that the ideal must eventually give

²⁷Elizabeth Boyd, Byron's 'Don Juan': A Critical Study (New York: The Humanities Press, 1958), p.68.

²⁸Marchand, Byron's Poetry, pp. 6-7.

way to the real; consequently the episode cannot be considered in isolation as a beautiful passage of love. The vision of a selfless love relationship is temporary, as it is being constantly replaced by the harsh reality of life. Indeed, the episode is best seen as a reflection of the still unresolved conflict in Byron's mind between the ideal and the real.

The idyll of Juan and Haidee follows immediately the gruesome cannibalism of the shipwreck. That Byron chooses to move from one extreme to the other, from the animal to the spiritual, within a few stanzas reflects the dichotomy which lies at the core of the narrative: a realization of the ideal, and of the failure of the real to measure up to that ideal. Critics of Don Juan generally agree that the Haidee episode itself reflects Byron's concept of ideal love. It is certainly an exception to the poet's usual realistic depiction of man and his corrupt society. C.M. Bowra sees the island story as reflecting "an ideal condition which [Byron] was always seeking but never found."²⁹ Comparing the episode to the Julia story, Rutherford says that "in the Julia story we had Byron the man of the world's delightful presentation of the actual, while in the Haidee idyll we have his tribute to the ideal."³⁰ Other critics have drawn

²⁹Bowra, "Don Juan", p. 194.

³⁰Rutherford, Byron: A Critical Study, p. 157.

attention to the association of natural beauty with ideal love, the idea of Haidee as a personification of innocence, images of Edenic paradise, the naturalness of both Haidee and the setting.³¹ Ridenour sees Juan's love for the maiden as a restoration of the paradisaal state, drawing support for his view from the numerous references in the episode to Eden, Paradise, and Eve.³² The relationship thus recreates the state of bliss from which man has fallen and to which man ideally wishes to return.

A close analysis of Haidee herself reveals that any simple interpretation of her role in the poem is misleading; indeed there are many questions and ambiguities connected with her. One can see her, for example, as innocent and unsophisticated, not affected by the pretensions of the women in civilized society.³³ Yet this view is not satisfactory. Haidee has obviously had some experience in the handling of suitors, for she has "Rejected several suitors, just to learn /How to accept a better in his turn." Again, much has been made of the statement that Haidee is "Nature's child", a concept no doubt strengthened by the emphasis placed on the natural surroundings. Both Juan and Haidee are aware

³¹See F. Beatty, "Byron's Concept of Ideal Love", Keats-Shelley Journal, XII (1963), pp. 37-54; H. Bloom, The Visionary Company, p. 256.

³²Ridenour, The Style of 'Don Juan', p. 83.

³³Marchand, Byron's Poetry, pp. 177-8.

of Nature's presence, and Nature seems equally aware of Haidee's existence:

While the sun smiled on her with his first flame,
And young Aurora kiss'd her lips with dew,
Taking her for a sister;

(II; cxlii)

This love is nurtured in the natural setting as Haidee speaks to her lover with a voice that is "the warble of a bird"; sexual consummation comes as they hear "the waves splash, and the wind so low", and as "the stars, their nuptial torches, shed /Beauty upon the beautiful". Yet even this view of Haidee as the Child of Nature may be exaggerated: she is not a child, nor is she without experience.

Nature, of course, presents us with a great paradox. The isle on which Juan is swept by the waves is certainly not a hospitable sight: "The shore look'd wild, without a trace of man, /And girt by formidable waves", with "boiling surf and bounding spray" and "An unknown barren beach." Its shores had obviously been the scene of many a shipwreck; it was one of Nature's violent moods that had cast Juan upon the rocks in the first place. The paradox of the beauty among the wrecks has been noted by George Ridenour: "It is a place where natural violence is tempered to beauty, but where the violence forms as indispensable basis to the beauty created."³⁴ One can find the same paradoxical element in Haidee herself, and in this sense

³⁴ G. Ridenour, The Style of 'Don Juan', p. 33.

only may she be termed a "child of Nature": brought up by a tyrannical father whose harshness parallels the roughness of the shore, she is the essence of beauty and love. It is ironic that the idyllic existence of Haidee and Juan must be supported by facilities supplied through piracy and murder. That violence makes possible both the creation and the destruction of beauty must be seen as the central paradox of the entire island episode. In fact, it seems inevitable that the process must ultimately reverse itself: since violence is at the base of the harmonious existence, it is a logical consequence that the harmony will eventually give way once more to violence. This is in fact what happens with the return of Lambro, a father who loves his daughter, yet who is the cause of her destruction. For in spite of his love, he cannot find it in his nature to forgive her for having usurped his worldly goods in his absence (even though Haidee believed him dead). The pirate wins the struggle, and young Juan is captured and stowed in the hold of one of Lambro's slave ships.

The conventional view of Lambro is that he represents the evil and corruption that destroy the beauty of love. He has also been seen as a representation of the social background; always an impending threat, but sometimes held in abeyance long enough for a brief period of happiness to be possible. He is a symbol of the tyranny of a materialistic society that flourishes by the exploitation of others.

Byron leaves no doubt in the reader's mind that Lambro will return and shatter the transitory glow of happiness, as he supplies the reader with hints and signs of foreboding: Haidee's dream of "being alone on the sea-shore, /Chain'd to a rock"; the coming of a "sudden tremor" during a moment of romantic involvement; the poet's own suggestion that young lovers should "die in happy spring".

The love relationship of Juan and Haidee is generally considered to be pure, not contaminated by the vices of normal social relationships. Indeed Byron says of his lovers that "they were /Unfit to mix in these thick solitudes /Call'd social, haunts of Hate, and Vice, and Care." (IV, xxviii). Yet one must come to grips with the intrusions of reality into the idyll and with the function that these intrusions serve. First of all, there are the foreshadowings of tragedy, the inevitability of failure:

Alas! they were so young, so beautiful,
 So lonely, loving, helpless, and the hour
 Was that in which the heart is always full,
 (II, cxcii)

A similar foreshadowing occurs in this passage:

. . . --We left Juan sleeping,
 Pillow'd upon a fair and happy breast,
 And watch'd by eyes that never yet knew weeping,
 And loved by a young heart, too deeply blest
 To feel the poison through her spirit creeping,
 Or know who rested there, a foe to rest,
 Had soil'd the current of her sinless years,
 And turn'd her pure heart's purest blood to tears!
 (III, i)

Such references can be regarded as illustrations of the

theme of transience and mutability. Byron expresses the longing that time will somehow stand still and that the two lovers will remain as "children"; yet at the same time he realizes that such a longing is in vain, that "circumstance, the greater uncreator, demolishes both--sweeps love and childhood and the past into the maelstrom of the present and transforms all into ugliness and waste."³⁵

Then we have the references to the fall from innocence. Byron speaks of the couple as "happy in the illicit /Indulgence of their innocent desires" with a deliberate juxtaposition of the words "illicit" and "innocent". Haidee rashly forgets that the island is her father's, and only too willingly wallows in its luxury and pleasures. Indeed, her readiness to believe that her father is dead (an episode passed over by the poet) and to take over as mistress of the isle illustrates the whole nature of the ideal state: it is built on a fabrication, an illusion that will all too soon be shattered. In fact, the "vision of a totally selfless and totally fulfilling love relationship" becomes somewhat less selfless and less fulfilling. Even in presenting his tribute to the ideal, Byron cannot shut out of his mind the real as he has known it in his personal relationships. This ambivalence has been explained in terms of the continuous conflict within Byron

³⁵Gleckner, Byron and the Ruins of Paradise, p. 342.

between his Calvinistic concept of mortal sin and his total abandonment to sexual pleasure.³⁶ It would seem that the sexual side is strong, as Byron sighs for the lovers: "Why did they not then die?" while they are at the height of their ecstasy. Sexual ecstasy is transient at best, and bears within its creative power the seeds of its own destruction. Thus a symbolic significance can be attached to the unborn child of Haidee.

Again, we find Byron during the Haidee episode, employing his usual deflation technique even in the midst of the most beautiful and passionate moments. It is worth considering several examples of this, as there is no agreement among critics about the function of such usages. There are the minor touches of reality: Zoe preparing breakfast as Haidee gazes on the sleeping Juan, the making of coffee, even the juxtaposition of ideal and real in the phrase "coffee and Haidee". Such intrusions may be explained as "enabling Byron to avoid overspiritualizing the romantic love of Juan and Haidee and abstracting one element of the experience to imply that it is the whole."³⁷ Yet it seems that Byron is unable to cope with an ideal situation without letting realities intrude. Several such examples lead one

³⁶Suggested By Beaty, "Byron's Concept of Ideal Love", p. 48.

³⁷Lovell, "Irony and Image. . . .", p. 233.

to conclude that this technique is much more than the mere intrusion of reality into an ideal world. At times, the poet uses deliberate deflation. One obvious example is the description of Haidee bending over the exhausted Juan:

And she bent o'er him, and he lay beneath,
Hush'd as the babe upon its mother's breast,
Droop'd as the willow when no winds can breathe,
Lull'd like the depth of ocean when at rest,
Fair as the crowning rose of the whole wreath,
Soft as the callow cygnet in its nest;
In short, he was a very pretty fellow,
Although his woes had turn'd him rather yellow.

(II, cxlviii)

The long list of beautiful similes culminates with a less idealistic physical characteristic, produced by the stark reality of Juan's earlier experiences--his yellow complexion. Similarly, Byron uses levity of treatment in his handling of Juan's reaction to Haidee's charming face:

For woman's face was never form'd in vain
For Juan, so that even when he pray'd
He turn'd from grisly saints, and martyrs hairy,
To the sweet portraits of the Virgin Mary.

(II, cxlix)

Even at the most touching moments, Byron invades the privacy of his lovers with such treatment:

A long, long kiss, a kiss of youth, and love,
And beauty, all concentrating like rays
Into one focus, kindled from above;
Such kisses as belong to early days,
Where heart, and soul, and sense, in concert move,
And the blood's lava, and the pulse a blaze,
Each kiss a heart-quake, --for a kiss's strength,
I think it must be reckon'd by its length.

(II, clxxxvi)

Byron also treats the disposal of Juan at the end of the episode with levity, digressing, then returning with Juan

"left half-kill'd some stanzas back". This deliberate interjection of the actual mechanics of the poem disrupts the ideal state being handled and shows the difficulty that Byron is having with it.

There are numerous other examples of this "bubble-bursting" technique throughout the Haidee episode; indeed, one significant example comes later in the narrative. Juan, now in captivity and on his way to the Turkish slave market, sadly recalls his romance with Haidee for his new acquaintance, an Englishman named Johnson. The reminiscent murmurings of Juan are followed rather sharply by an account of Johnson and his three wives. Then, there are the digressions and personal notes interjected by the author himself, which tend to disrupt the narrative.³⁸ While it can be shown that such digressions (even the digression on digressions) have a natural starting point in the narrative, nevertheless they do force the imposition of the 'persona' of the narrator between us and the story.

A final example is the desolation of the island at the end of the episode, after the departure of Juan and the death of Haidee. This scene does more than just shatter the illusion of the ideal; it reminds us that just as Lambro has destroyed something very dear to Juan, so Juan has left his

³⁸M.K. Joseph notes that in Canto III, Byron rises above the average amount of digression, to 40%--the highest in any of the early cantos. [Byron the Poet, p. 199].

mark, for the island in all its beauty has been reduced to this pathetic scene:

That isle is now all desolate and bare,
 Its dwellings down, its tenants pass'd away;
 None but her own and father's grave is there,
 And nothing outward tells of human clay;
 Ye could not know where lies a thing so fair,
 No stone is there to show, no tongue to say,
 What was; no dirge, except the hollow sea's,
 Mourns o'er the beauty of the Cyclades.³⁹

(IV, lxxii)

Most critics do not consider that such examples of digression and deflation have any detrimental effect on the overall vision of idealized love that these cantos portray.³⁹ While such examples may serve "to root the situation and the characters more firmly in reality",⁴⁰ there appears to exist some confusion and instability of feeling on the part of the poet. One gets the distinct impression that the whole manner of presentation is a facade, a type of "defence mechanism".⁴¹ There seems to be a definite "pattern: the author evokes an emotion, and almost immediately draws back from it in a mocking manner. The implication is not that the emotion itself is worthless or pretentious, but that the poet feels he has gone too far and must withdraw. Thus one can explain Byron's inability to linger on the ideal

³⁹Typical of this view is Marchand's comment that the half-cynical remarks are "consonant with the author's penchant for seeing several facets of every situation and emotional state at the same time" [Byron's Poetry, p.178].

⁴⁰Rutherford, Byron A Critical Study, p. 155.

⁴¹This concept is developed fully by Rutherford.

with any degree of consistency. It is not so much that he "lingers over the story of Haidee and Juan as though he were reluctant himself to resume his satirical and bitter manner."⁴² Rather Byron is unable to linger over the idyll for any length of time without the intrusion of the bitter and satirical manner that was so much a part of his personality.

What, then, is left when the episode is over? Is the ideal left "inviolable", as Marchand suggests?⁴³ It is true that Haidee has to die, but Juan lives to move on to other adventures and to eventual dissipation. The implication here is that the incident is meant to have more impact on the female than on the male; indeed, the same can be said of the affairs that have been discussed. There is a particularly striking resemblance between this episode and the Julia romance in this regard, a resemblance that can readily be noted by examining the following passage from Julia's letter

'Man's love is of man's life a thing apart,
'Tis woman's whole existence; man may range
The court, camp, church, the vessel, and the mart;
Sword, gown, gain, glory, offer in exchange
Pride, fame, ambition, to fill up his heart,
And few there are whom these cannot estrange;
Men have all these resources, we but one,
To love again, and be again undone.'

(I, cxciv)

This is similar to the following comment made during the

⁴²J. Erskine, "A Romantic Autobiography: Don Juan" Delineator, CXII (1928), p. 88.

⁴³Marchand, Byron's Poetry, p. 178.

— glowing details of the Haidee affair:

Alas! the love of women! it is known
 To be a lovely and a fearful thing;
 For all of theirs upon that die is thrown,
 And if 'tis lost, life hath no more to bring
 To them but mockeries of the past alone,
 (II, cxcix)

Haidee's death can also be seen as a means of preventing her falling into the usual mold of women, as outlined in the following stanza:

In her first passion woman loves her lover,
 In all the others all she loves is love,
 Which grows a habit she can ne'er get over
 And fits her loosely--like an easy glove,
 As you may find, whene'er you like to prove her:
 One man alone at first her heart can move;
 She then prefers him in the plural number,
 Not finding that the additions much encumber.
 (III, iii)

While Juan is permitted to go on to other "loves", Haidee must die rather than take on men in the "plural number".

If Haidee is seen as the ideal in love, then the death of her unborn child, "the second principle of life", must represent the finality of such ideals. There is no other pregnancy in the Don Juan narrative; indeed, there is no other woman like Haidee in the poem. Thus the "bleeding flower and blasted fruit of love" signifies the expulsion, violent though it may be, of the ideal, and a re-entry into the realm of reality. It is as though Byron has done what he can with the concept of ideal love, and is quite ready to return to material with which he is much more familiar.

A final brief glimpse of the ideal woman is granted

in the last two cantos of Don Juan with the introduction of Aurora Raby:

Aurora Raby, a young star who shone
 O'er life, too sweet an image for such glass,
 A lovely being, scarcely form'd or moulded,
 A rose with all its sweetest leaves yet folded.
 (XV, xliii)

She is the one potential bride for Juan that Lady Adeline omitted from her list; she comes at the end of a long list of possible candidates, culminating in Miss Millpond, "smooth as the summer's sea". Juan is attracted to Aurora because of her apparent indifference and aloofness, qualities which must have seemed refreshing to the pursued Spaniard. It is quite likely that Byron would have had a relationship develop between them, had the poem continued:

. . . he caught Aurora's eye on his,
 And something like a smile upon her cheek.
 Now this he really rather took amiss;
 In those who rarely smile, their smile bespeaks
 A strong external motive. . . .
 (XVI, xcii)

The chief function of Aurora Raby is to permit the reader to gain further insight into the poet's concept of the ideal. Her qualities of sadness, loneliness, and essential isolation distinguish her from the other company, and suggest the transience and mutability of what she represents: her aspect was "lonely" and "mournful", her eyes "sadly shone", she was a follower of "fallen worship". She represents the final attempt to create a lasting ideal which must inevitably fail: "She look'd as if she sat by Eden's door, /And grieved for those who could return no more." She

stands in direct contrast to the world of imperfect realities around her:

She gazed upon a world she scarcely knew,
 As seeking not to know it; silent, lone,
 As grows a flower, thus quietly she grew,
 And kept her heart serene within its zone.
 There was awe in the homage which she drew;
 Her spirit seem'd as seated on a throne
 Apart from the surrounding world, and strong
 In its own strength--most strange in one so young!
 (XV, xlvii)

She exists in the midst of the confusion of appearance and reality that pervades the English society on whose periphery she stands; it is thus that she serves as a most apt foil to both the Lady Adeline and "her frolic grace--FitzFulke":

"A beauteous ripple of the brilliant stream /Of rank and youth, though purer than the rest" (XV, lv). Quiet and reserved, she is the direct opposite of the obvious advances of the Duchess and the more subtle innuendoes of the Lady.

What effect does Aurora Raby have on Don Juan? Most significant is the fact that she has renewed in him feelings that have hardened during the interval since his affair with Haidee:

And certainly Aurora had renew'd
 In him some feelings he had lately lost,
 Or harden'd; feelings which, perhaps ideal,
 Are so divine, that I must deem them real:--
 (XVI, cvii)

Ironically, this admission is followed by an incident in which Don Juan is ensnared in the embraces of the Duchess disguised as a ghost. Appearance becomes reality, and the ideal reality is once again overshadowed. The world of

hypocrisy, deception and scheming causes the ideal to fade into the background.

Aurora Raby has been viewed by some critics as a "transplanted" Haidee.⁴⁴ Indeed one can readily note similarities: within both, fundamental nature has remained uncorrupted by the world. The external and internal beauty of Haidee is reflected anew in Aurora, and each can be seen as "an ideal among imperfect realities."⁴⁵ Both are in essence isolated from their social environment, and both dwell in realms of solitude. But here the similarities cease. For Aurora lacks the "natural" qualities of Haidee, and is a much more intricate part of a set of circumstances; she is part of a social network, and is in this sense "artificial" rather than "natural". The poet summarizes this essential difference in his famous "flower and gem" comparison:

Juan knew nought of such a character--
 High, yet resembling not his lost Haidee;
 Yet each was radiant in her proper sphere:
 The island girl, bred up by the lone sea,
 More warm, as lovely, and not less sincere,
 Was Nature's all: Aurora could not be,
 Nor would be thus:--the difference in them
 Was such as lies between a flower and a gem.
 (XV, lviii)

Both Haidee and Aurora Raby are introduced into Juan's life at a time when he has been victimized by

⁴⁴For example, Steffan in "The Twice Two Thousand", p. 273.

⁴⁵Joseph, Byron the Poet, p. 247.

hypocrisy: Haidee "rescues" him from the memories of Donna Julia, and Aurora offers him an alternative to the wiles and lasciviousness of Lady Adeline and the Duchess. In the latter case, however, the situation is far more complicated, as the hero is still in the midst of the company of hypocrites; there has not been the interlude of a storm and a shipwreck. It is as if Eden is being recreated in the midst of the sinful world. Since the experiment failed in the isolated natural setting of Haidee's island, it is inevitably doomed to failure in the more artificial setting of London society.

In his presentation of individual women, Byron intends to create the impression that women are responsible for the havoc in the personal lives of men. By their deception, lies, schemes, and interference, they make it very difficult for man to achieve happiness. This seems to be the lesson of Don Juan's adventures, for his troubles can be clearly traced to women: his mother fails as a mother because of her hypocrisy and self-centredness; Julia fails by leading the innocent youth into a sexual trap; Gulbeyaz attempts to take away his most precious possession, his freedom; Catherine drains him of his sexual prowess; Adeline schemes for him while concealing her true feelings. Even the ideal Haidee bears a share of responsibility, for she nurses Juan to a life of ease and luxury, confident that her father will not return. With the majority of the women, Byron leaves us feeling contempt; with the others, we are left disillusioned. In every case, Byron's examination of woman has found her wanting.

CHAPTER 4

BYRON'S SATIRE AND THE TREATMENT OF WOMEN

Byron's subjectivity is nowhere more apparent than in his treatment of women. The attitudes expressed towards women and marriage reveal much about the personality of the author, even when considered in isolation from biographical facts. An analysis of the scornful and contemptuous treatment of women reveals three distinct characteristics, which are rooted in the poet's personality and which are central to an understanding of attitudes toward women throughout Don Juan. These characteristics are humor, chauvinism, and egotism.

Humor

But nevertheless I hope it is no crime
To laugh at all things- (VII, ii)

Indeed in Don Juan Byron does laugh at many things with his humor taking on many forms and serving various purposes. The major forms of expression of this humor are frivolity, farce, deflation, and cynicism, ranging from levity on the one extreme to savagery on the other.

Much of the humor in Don Juan is light and frothy, of the type that Byron had used freely in Beppo; the poet on such occasions seems to be thoroughly enjoying himself, as reflected particularly in his deliberate choice of words and rhymes. While he may have the intention of saying something

serious, he is obviously laughing as he writes the lines:

"But--Oh! ye lords of ladies intellectual, /Inform us truly
have they not hen-peck'd you all?" (I, xxii) Levity is
frequently used in the treatment of women, especially in the
earlier cantos. Donna Inez and Donna Julia are the recipients
of much of this humor; for example, Byron takes delight in
describing how Inez supplies expurgated books for her son's
study:

Juan was taught from out the best edition,
Expurgated by learned men, who place,
Judiciously, from out the schoolboy's vision,
The grosser parts; but fearful to deface
Too much their modest bard by this omission,
And pitying sore this mutilated case,
They only add them all in an appendix,
Which saves, in fact, the trouble of an index;
(I, xliv)

Donna Julia's efforts to remain chaste and true are also
treated lightly, as the poet has her move from praying to
"the Virgin Mary for her grace" to her final submission,
"And whispering 'I will ne'er consent'--consented". The
poet's laughter rings clearly through these lines.

One can find numerous short cryptic remarks about
women that are intended to draw a chuckle from the reader:
"a lady always distant from the fact" (I, clxxviii); "Free
as a married woman" (II, clxxv); "females like exaggeration"
(VII, lxxv); "single ladies wishing to be double" (XII, lviii).
These are significant, for the objects of Byron's satire are
not so much the individual women that ruined (as he thought)
his life, but women in general.

At times, the frivolous humor develops into farce. The bedroom scene in Canto I, for example, is essentially farcical and is based on "situation comedy":

Alfonso closed his speech, and begg'd her pardon,
Which Julia half withheld, and then half granted,
And laid conditions, he thought very hard, on,
Denying several little things he wanted:
He stood like Adam lingering near his garden,
With useless penitence perplex'd and haunted,
Beseeching she no further would refuse,
When, lo! he stumbled o'er a pair of shoes.

(I, clxxx)

Juan hiding "half-smother'd" in the bed, Alfonso discovering the shoes and chasing the half-naked Juan down the corridor, Julia hurrying to the closet, and Antonia crying "Rape!" all add to the farcical effect. Farce is again employed with great success in the episode which finds Juan (Juanpa) in the harem: the calm Dudu awakens with a scream while the disguised Juan sleeps on "as fast as ever husband by his mate / In holy matrimony snores away". Dudu's "dream" is a master stroke of farce:

That just as her young lip began to ope
Upon the golden fruit the vision bore,
A bee flew out, and stung her to the heart,
And so--she woke with a great scream and start.

(VI, lxxvii)

Again in the final complete canto of the poem, Byron employs farce; the antics of the Duchess who appears as a ghost are revealed for what they are:

The ghost, if ghost it were, seem'd a sweet soul
As ever lurk'd beneath a holy hood:
A dimpled chin, a neck of ivory, stole
Forth into something much like flesh and blood;

Back fell the sable frock and dreary cowl,
 And they reveal'd--alas! that e'er they should!
 In full, voluptuous, but not o'ergrown bulk,
 The phantom of her frolic Grace--Fitz-Fulke!
 (XVI, cxxiii)

Levity and farce are used mainly for the humorous effects produced. While in each case, one can trace the humor to a serious undercurrent of intention, the humor is well able to stand on its own merit. There are other uses of humor, however, where the serious intention is so significant that it cannot be ignored. Indeed, the humor in these cases is subordinated to the seriousness of purpose. One type of such humor is used for the purpose of deflation, one of the best examples being the deflation of the fine sentiment expressed in Julia's letter. Having presented the letter, Byron proceeds first to have Juan retch in seasickness as he thinks of its writer, then to have the letter used for lots to determine who will be the victim of cannibalism, and finally to have Juan forget Julia so quickly when confronted with Haidee (Juan never mentions Julia again; but Byron does as if to remind the reader of what he has done to her.)

Deflation is employed, though to a lesser extent, in the Haidee episode. Touches of reality keep intruding into the idyllic paradise of the lovers, as if the poet is unable to forget even for a brief while that the isle is an illusion. In this episode, the deflation is in a way more serious and despairing; whereas in dealing with Julia, Byron is

undermining hypocrisy, and deception. Here he is undermining his own positive vision of the ideal. It may be that he is striving to prevent himself from slipping too far into a world of illusion; or even that he cannot admit that such a world is possible. Perhaps he is upset because even his ideal world fails to measure up to his expectations of it. At any rate, he withdraws again and again, using humor as his mechanism of escape.

Frequently Byron uses humor for much more cynical and even savage motives. Juan's seasickness does more than deflate the sentiments of Julia and her letter; it tears those feelings to shreds. Maybe the poet feels that this is what such sentiments deserve; in any case, his treatment of Julia and her memory, though amusing, is unduly harsh. Even more harsh is the handling of Donna Inez; of course, this woman as portrayed is deserving of contempt, and no doubt Byron had his wife in mind as he drew his portrait. Whether or not one can condone the harshness on the grounds of the hurt that Byron had personally received, the fact remains that Inez is presented in very harsh terms. Other scenes in the poem rely for their effect on very grim humor especially in the shipwreck scene. Women are not the only victims of Byron's attacks; but the attacks on women and related subjects seem to be more frequent and embittered.

One can hardly deny the existence of a strong comic element in Don Juan; but whether that element is the most

significant part of the total vision is debatable. It is true that many critics have warned readers about taking Don Juan too seriously; for example, Helen Gardner argues that "in spite of the power of Byron's bursts of satire, the underlying impulse of the poem is not satiric. It began as a farce and developed into a comedy."¹ But when the purpose of humor is ridicule and condemnation, then the comic spirit certainly yields to something less amusing. Even the light and playful moods of the poem are somewhat damning when considered in the total context. Nowhere is this more evident than in the treatment of women.

There is another aspect to Byron's use of humor that must be considered. Because Byron employs so many forms of humor, it becomes difficult at times to determine whether he intends the reader to take him seriously. There are occasions, of course, when he is obviously joking while pretending to be serious; for example, speaking of the form of his epic poem, he says: "The regularity of my design / Forbids all wandering as the worst of sinning" (I, vii). At other times, the problem is more complex, as Byron makes a seemingly serious statement then proceeds to undercut it:

I hate inconstancy--I loathe, detest,
Abhor, condemn, abjure the mortal made
Of such quicksilver clay that in his breast
No permanent foundations can be laid;

¹Helen Gardner, "Don Juan" London Magazine, V, n. 7 (1958), p. 63.

Love, constant love, has been my constant guest,
 And yet last night, being at a masquerade,
 I saw the prettiest creature, fresh from Milan,
 Which gave me some sensations like a villain.

(II, ccix)

Even more complex are passages such as the following:

Alas! the love of women! it is known
 To be a lovely and a fearful thing;
 For all of theirs upon that die is thrown,
 And if 'tis lost, life hath no more to bring
 To them but mockeries of the past alone,
 And their revenge is as the tiger's spring,
 Deadly, and quick, and crushing; yet, as real
 Torture is theirs, what they inflict they feel.

They are right; for man, to man so oft unjust,
 Is always so to women; one sole bond
 Awaits them, treachery is all their trust;
 Taught to conceal, their bursting hearts despond
 Over their idol, till some wealthier lust
 Buys them in marriage--and what rests beyond?
 A thankless husband, next a faithless lover,
 Then dressing, nursing, praying, and all's over.

(II, cxcix-cc)

At face value these lines indicate that Byron is showing both sympathy and understanding for women and their plight. But can we be so sure that the poet is serious? In the next stanza he lists some of the ways that women have to offset their unfortunate situations, and the tone becomes somewhat mocking again:

Some take a lover, some take drams or prayers,
 Some mind their household, other dissipation,
 Some run away, and but exchange their cares,
 Losing the advantage of a virtuous station;
 Few changes e'er can better their affairs,
 Theirs being an unnatural situation,
 From the dull palace to the dirty hovel:
 Some play the devil, and then write a novel.

(II, cci)

At the very least, there is a slight hint of insincerity in

these lines which makes one question in retrospect the sincerity of the preceding stanzas.

Byron himself claims that the reason for so much humor in the poem is that "I may not weep" (IV, iv). Certainly, a basic question that needs answering at this point is why Byron employs so much humor if the essential tone of the poem is serious. One answer that has been suggested is that the humor is intended to teach the reader to live life without illusions. Because it attracts and holds attention, humor is likely to have a very lasting effect, thus becoming a valuable didactic tool. If viewed in this way, the comic episodes make us laugh at our own vain and futile attempts to deceive ourselves and others. Such a didactic function presupposes that the poet has a basic fondness for the human condition that he is castigating. Bostetter claims that Byron "finds life sufficiently worth while to expose the fundamental evils that stand in the way of realizing human potentialities."² Another possible answer is that the humor is a form of acceptance; it is Byron's attempt to "come to terms with an imperfect world--at least to the point of finding it an amusing place."³ Or again, the essence of the comic vision may arise from an attempt to reconcile two contradictory and incongruous responses: the

²Bostetter, "Introduction" to Twentieth Century Interpretations of 'Don Juan', p. 14

³Marchand, Byron's Poetry, p. 245.

emotional and the rational.

There is some truth in all of these answers. But the chief reason that the seriousness of purpose is so frequently obscured by humor is the fact that humor itself is the most powerful weapon that Byron has to express his feelings and attitudes. This is especially so in the case of women. The attitudes of scorn and contempt can be revealed in no more effective and lasting way than by subjecting the victims to buffoonery or ridicule. Even the facetious remarks made about women, marriage, and love, though gently amusing in themselves, are made with the deliberate aim of arousing satirical and even scornful laughter.

Chauvinism

Frail mariners afloat without a chart,
They run before the wind through high seas breaking;
(XIV, lxxiv)

This is the essence of Byron's treatment of women. The lines suggest not only that women are the weaker sex in need of man's strong arm, but also a hint of contempt. For what mariner in his right mind would sail without a chart? Don Juan is a man's poem about women; Byron makes this clear again and again as he speaks for all men (or so he presumes):

"But thus it is some women will betray us" (XLV, lxxii).

Byron's attitude throughout the poem is chauvinistic. At times, there are touches of contempt which are essentially sexist: speaking of Seville, he calls it a pleasant city, famous for "oranges and women" (I, viii); again, he writes

"the night /Shows stars and women in a better light". (II, Ciii). In both of these examples, the word "women" is placed by an object, with the intention of a derogatory comparison.

All of Juan's troubles are caused by women: his mother ruins his chances for a well-rounded education; a woman causes him to be sent away from home; a woman, though beautiful, lures him into a false sense of security to be shattered with the return of her piratical father; a sultana purchases him for her pleasure; an empress makes demands on him that are too much for his constitution; a Lady schemes for his welfare while hiding from herself her real motives; a Duchess entices Juan into a rather compromising situation. Along his journey, poor Juan is beset again and again by females. One begins to wonder whether a man can create any problems of his own! ✓

The generalization of women as scheming deceivers, liars who do not know their own mind, who use tears to achieve their selfish goals, is most unfair. The same one-sided treatment is applied to marriage which is seen as a "padlock" preventing man from achieving his full potential. Men are trapped into marriage, men are "forced" to be unfaithful: women are the source and cause of these complaints. Women are portrayed as being unreliable in love:

In her first passion woman loves her lover,
 In all the others all she loves is love,
 Which grows a habit she can ne'er get over
 And fits her loosely--like an easy glove,
 As you may find, where'er you like to prove her:
 One man alone at first her heart can move;
 She then prefers him in the plural number,
 Not finding that the additions much encumber.

(III, iii)

This is hardly a fair assessment when one considers Juan himself. In spite of his passionate outbursts to the contrary, he soon forgets Julia; he fondly remembers Haidee while in the Sultana's court, but this is because Byron wishes to portray his hero tearing himself away from an imperious woman. Juan allows himself to succumb to the lustful demands of Catherine; he seems headed towards an affair with Adeline, and possibly also with Aurora Raby. He certainly prefers his women in "the plural number".

Women are frequently portrayed as sex objects; a good example of this is the following stanza:

I love the sex, and sometimes would reverse
 The tyrant's wish, 'that mankind only had
 One neck, which he with one fell stroke might pierce:
 My wish is quite as wide, but not so bad,
 And much more tender on the whole than fierce;
 It being (not now, but only while a lad)
 That womankind had but one rosy mouth,
 To kiss them all at once from North to South.

(VI, xxvii)

This is the one function of women that Byron does not criticize. The following advice given by the poet seems to sum up his chauvinistic attitudes: "And young beginners may as well commence /With quiet cruising o'er the ocean Woman" (XIII, xl). The poet takes it upon himself to provide

the expert advice on how to handle women; he presents women as a form of pleasure for man's "cruising"; women are passive providers of man's enjoyment. This is really the only "positive" quality that Byron sees in the opposite sex. It, too, like the other attitudes, is filled with contempt.

Egotism

What lies behind both the humor and the chauvinism in Don Juan is the egotism of the poet. The ego is so dominant that the poet fails almost completely to distance himself from the experiences of his hero. He cannot resist adding his own personal commentary as the narrative unfolds. This egotism explains why Byron finds it necessary to expose women to scorn and ridicule; it lies at the root of his chauvinism.

Two aspects of this egotism need to be examined separately. First there is his irritation that women in particular fail to measure up to his sense of perfection. He is sure that he knows what the world should be like and how women should behave in that world. His anger at their failure to do what he thinks they should is essentially an anger of egotism; his hurt pride causes him to lash out at those creatures that refuse to live up to his high standards. The second aspect of Byron's egotism is partly biographical in nature: he resents the fact that he still needs women physically, even though he despises them for the havoc they have caused him personally. It must be a terrible blow to

one's ego and pride to have to admit to oneself a need for that which one views with contempt. The solution to the dilemma is found in the forms of humor and chauvinism that abound in Don Juan.

Byron has the habit of generalizing from the particular: he discovers a fault in a single woman, and blows it out of all reasonable proportion by universalizing it. This most unfair method is evident in the following passage:

A tigress robb'd of young, a lioness,
Or any interesting beast of prey,
Are similes at hand for the distress
Of ladies who cannot have their own way;
(V, cxxxii)

Byron moves from a particular reference to Gulbeyaz' "angry brow" in the previous stanza to this generalization about "ladies who cannot have their own way." The following comment about Gulbeyaz is another example of this: "She was a good deal shock'd; not shock'd at tears, {For women shed and use them at their liking" (V, cxviii). Thus a weakness created in Gulbeyaz is applied to all womankind. In numerous instances, Byron speaks of women in the aggregate, tagging them all with undesirable characteristics noted in the women of his own creation. In a line such as "old flames, new wives, become our bitterest foes" (X, xii) Byron's egotism encourages him not only to generalize about women but also to speak for all men. He deals with marriage in the same way, passing a judgement which he is not really in any position to make. When speaking of Alfonso and Julia, he writes:

"They lived together as most people do, /Suffering each other's foibles by accord" (I, lxxv). There are numerous examples of similar remarks: "The charming creatures lie with such a grace" (I, clxxviii); "They blush, and we believe them" (I, clxxix); "females love exaggeration" (VII, lxxv); "changed as quickly as hearts after marriage" (XIII, xlvi); "pretty, precious plagues" who "won't let you go" (XIV, lxiii).

Byron in essence is taking it upon himself to make serious judgements. He frequently does more than make a personal observation; he attempts to speak for Man in the aggregate about Woman in the aggregate. And Woman is found wanting. Byron is so subjective in his treatment of women that he is unable to be fair. Indeed, he seems obsessed with the topics of women, marriage and love, with whole sections of the poem being devoted to them. Very few stanzas pass without some reference to one or the other of these topics.⁴ Even in the war scenes, where topically the poet is farthest removed from these subjects, he is unable to resist introducing them:

The whole camp rung with joy; you would have thought
That they were going to a marriage feast
(This metaphor, I think, holds good as aught,
Since there is discord after both at least):
(VII, xlix)

⁴C.W. Hagelman And R.J. Barnes, in their Concordance to Byron's 'Don Juan' (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), note the following occurrences: "love", 219; "women", 56; "ladies", 46; "woman", 45; "wife", 38; "marriage", 28.

Suwarrow says of women to Johnson:

. . . . You should have been
 Aware this kind of baggage never thrives;
 Save wed a year, I hate recruits with wives."
 (VII, lxx)

During the course of the war episode, there are several other comments about women and love which are totally irrelevant and are personal intrusions on the part of a poet because he cannot leave the topic alone.⁵

Owing to his supreme egotism, Byron attaches many faults to the women in his narrative. While it is true that this may be realistic, he seems to distribute them disproportionately. The women have few redeeming qualities; where such do appear, they are soon negated by deflation. It is difficult for Byron to concede the possibility of a good woman, unless she is so far removed from reality that she is an impossibility. It is true that Byron's attacks are not limited to women as even the men in the poem are found wanting: Don José goes "plucking various fruit"; Don Alfonso is rumored to have had an affair with Inez; the Sultan is so narrow-minded as to be certain that "the earth was square / Because he had journey'd fifty miles" and found no evidence to the contrary; the Russian generals are inept and greedy; Lord Henry is cold and proud. Byron even has trouble with his hero; at one point Juan becomes quite dissipated.

⁵For other examples see Canto VII, stanzas i, viii, xvi, lxii, lxxv, lxxxiv; Canto VIII, xxii, xxvii, liii, cxiii.

But the attacks on men are not nearly as bitter and sustained as those on women. All one needs to do is to compare the treatment of José with Inez, Alfonso with Julia, the Sultan with Gulbeyaz, the generals with Catherine, Henry with Adeline, to realize that Byron saves his sharpest satire for the women. The hero's integrity, briefly threatened, is saved as the blame for his dissipation is partially shifted to the excessive sexual demands of the Empress.

Women receive a more sustained attack and a greater proportion of the ridicule. The fact that Byron extends his satire beyond the women of the poem does not make the satiric attack on women any less severe. Indeed, Don Juan is consistently presented as the victim of women, as Byron considered himself to be. Juan is never the cause of a complicated situation, but an innocent victim of circumstances beyond his control. Thus Byron seems to attempt to convince the reader that he too should be pitied as a victim of the scheming of others. It is rather egotistical of him to expect a reader to absolve either Juan or himself from any responsibility for the havoc in each of their lives.

Conclusion:

There is no agreement among critics about the purpose and the tone of Don Juan, except that "the controlling unity of the poem must be sought in the psychological over-view,

the attitude toward human life and experience. . . ."⁶ Many critics see the poem as essentially comic and optimistic; for example, Alvin Kernan argues that "Don Juan . . . ends on an affirmation of the goodness of life, and the entire poem is thus framed by a comic view of experience."⁷ At the other extreme one finds a nihilistic interpretation held by such critics as Harold Bloom who feels that "what haunts Byron is the specter of meaninglessness, of pointless absurdity."⁸

It is difficult to decide what vision the poem purports as one is forced to confront not only the poem but the facts of Byron's rather complex life and personality: his own experiences as a child, his rejection by Mary Chaworth, the hounding of Caroline Lamb, the failure of his marriage and the bitterness of the ensuing separation, the rumours of incest. A knowledge of such information, while not absolutely necessary, is most helpful; yet one must not fall victim to the temptation to read Don Juan solely as autobiography. The use of the biographical data is legitimate to the extent that it enables one to obtain a clearer understanding of the attitudes of the poet toward his subject material. A man who feels himself the victim of unfair attack and abuse, who has been ostracized from a society that

⁶Bostetter, "Introduction", p. 13.

⁷Alvin B. Kernan, The Plot of Satire (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), p. 199.

⁸Bloom, The Visionary Company, p. 258.

had a few months before considered him its darling, is not likely to remain too detached from a narrative which deals with women and society. Add to this the combination of aggressiveness and sensitivity that make up the poet's personality, and it is virtually impossible to conceive of his writing an epic poem that does not have his personality indelibly stamped upon it. Indeed, as Bowra says, the poem is "an extremely personal document in which the whole of Byron is contained."⁹ Much of the essence of the poem is to be found not in the narrative itself but in the passages of digression and commentary, where Byron speaks directly to the reader.

Thus it is little wonder that an epic poem by a man such as Byron should contain so much about women, marriage and love. No doubt Byron felt himself in an adequate position to discuss such topics, and he does not hesitate to speak in a voice marked by authority and with contempt. It may be as Leslie Marchand claims, that Byron was writing "out of his personal need for emotional release"¹⁰ Whether this is the case, the fact is that Byron is abusive, sometimes more than is necessary, in his treatment of women.¹¹ Byron stands

⁹Bowra, "Don Juan", p. 185.

¹⁰Marchand, Byron's Poetry, p. 12.

¹¹Hugh Walker goes even further: "Don Juan . . . is the work of a vicious man; and the vice is not explained away or excused by pronouncing the word satire" [English Satire and Satirists, p. 276].

behind the poem as the supreme egotist, who projects his image of himself into the poem and allows that image to do the writing. One can hardly expect women to receive a fair hearing.

Byron viewed the world through a lens coloured by his own unfortunate experiences and embittered attitudes.

Consequently, he cannot be fair or objective. His satire on women and marriage is, for the most part, negative, with very little evidence of constructive alternatives being presented. "Experience led him to nothing but uncertainty and indecision, with the result that he became content to destroy, since he was unable to construct."¹² A major object of that destruction is woman, and in the context of his poem, he carries out a very thorough job.

And if I laugh at any mortal thing,
'Tis that I may not weep;

(IV, iv)

These lines have been used frequently to support the contention that Byron's laughter and ridicule is a substitute for a sincere grief. But the tears are not so much tears of grief at a world gone astray as tears of frustration brought on by the awareness that the world is not as he would have made it.

¹² Fuess, Lord Byron as a Satirist in Verse, p. 179.

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